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MY FAITH

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MY FAITH

BY

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PREFACE

THIS small book has been written at the request of the Committee of the Anglican Evangelical Group Movement. It has been subjected to criticism by members of the Movement, and may therefore be said to represent in a general way the outlook of Liberal Evangelicalism. There may be, however, some opinions expressed in it which would not command the assent of all the members of the Movement. Responsibility for any statement rests with the author.

The volume is intended to be a simple statement of the Christian Faith, as a Liberal Evangelical views it. Technicalities have been, as far as is possible, avoided. It is hoped that the book may be found suitable for Confirmation candidates, members of Bible classes or study circles, and generally for distribution in parishes.

V. F. S.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY,
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MY FAITH

CHAPTER I

GOD THE FATHER

Is There a God?

Most people have believed in the past, and believe today, in the existence of God. This book starts with assuming that God exists. The world in which we live is too wonderful a place to have made itself, or to have come into being by chance. Some mind planned it and is directing its course. All around us we see beauty, order, purpose, and so we say: "There is a Creator who made the world and is still making it." Again, we have that within us which points to God. It is a remarkable thing that every race or tribe of men has had a religion of some kind. There is something in man which leads him to search for God. He is restless and unsatisfied until he finds Him. If there is no God, why should there be in us this instinct which drives us to search for Him and to enter into fellowship with Him? But if God exists and made us, then we can understand how God would naturally want us to know about Himself, and so He would plant, as it were, signs and tokens of His presence in our hearts.

We may believe, however, in God's existence without having any very clear idea of the nature of God. And so we pass on to ask, What is God like? How are we to think rightly of God? Christianity answers these questions by saying that *God is like Jesus Christ*. In Jesus Christ God has given to men the perfect revelation of Himself. God is so great that there must be sides and aspects of Him which are hidden from us. But we believe that Jesus has revealed the heart of God, and such of His divine purposes as concern our human race. Jesus is the window through which we look into the innermost nature and character of God. If, then, we would think rightly of God, we must have no lower and no different thought of Him than Jesus had; no other idea of Him than what is shown us in the Person, work, and teaching of Jesus.

Of course, we learn about God in many ways. As knowledge of all kinds grows, so do we discover more about God and about His manner of working in the world. Mankind will know more about God in a thousand years than it does now. But this growing knowledge of God will not alter the revelation of God given by Jesus. That will stand unchanged. You may from a single centre draw with compasses a series of widening circles, but the centre remains the same. So the central revelation given in Jesus remains, while round it we draw our widening circles of knowledge of God.

In studying God as seen in Jesus we have to consider two things: (*a*) First, what may we learn

about God from what Jesus Himself was and did? (*b*) Secondly, what did Jesus teach about God?

Jesus the Mirror of God.

Let us ask what would one who had never before heard of Christianity think about God, if he were told that in Jesus he saw God in action. Among the conclusions he would reach are certainly the following. He would say that God loved men, cared for them, wanted to help them, and took an interest in each individual person.[1] He would say that God was not satisfied with human life, that He saw something wrong with it, and that this wrong thing called "sin" was hateful to God, whose character was perfectly good and holy.[2] He would further conclude that God was dealing with this wrong state of affairs, was wanting to set it right, and had come Himself among men in the Person of Jesus to unravel the tangle.[3] In other words, he would say: "If this Jesus is God in action, then I must not think of God as far off in some distant heaven. I must think of Him as very near to men, and coming close to human life. I must think of Him as a Father offering gifts and blessings to His children, wanting to help them,

[1] *Cf.* Matt. vi. 31, 32; John x. 14, 15. Note His love for the children, Mark x. 14.

[2] *Cf.* John xv. 22, 24; Matt. xviii. 3, 4; Matt. xiii. 41, 42, and all the Parables of Judgment.

[3] *Cf.* Luke xv. Parables of Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, and Prodigal: *cf.* Matt. xviii. 12-14.

longing to give them something which will enable them to live better lives. If this is really what God is like, then the very best name for Him is Father, because He acts as a loving father acts, because He has always at heart the best interests of His human children." And now suppose that men refuse this help of God and go on sinning. What is God's attitude to such? Our friend, with Jesus before him as the mirror of God, would, surely, reach two more conclusions. First, that such ingratitude and wilfulness deeply wound and hurt God's tender heart of love; secondly, that, though God is always ready to forgive anyone who repents and to receive him back into loving fellowship, He cannot do so unless the repentance is sincere. He would learn from Jesus that sin was a barrier between man and God, which spoiled the relationship between them. He would begin to understand how God hated sin, because His love was a perfectly holy love; and how God looked for holiness in men. He would learn that God was no easy-going God who did not mind whether His children lived bad or good lives.

The Teaching of Jesus about God.

The name which Jesus gave to God was "Father." God had been called by that name in the Old Testament, but Jesus gave to the word a meaning so much richer and tenderer than it had had before, that He may be said to have created anew the

thought of God. Father is a word taken from family life, and it was as sons in the family of the Heavenly Father that Jesus bade men think of themselves. The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man are the two great foundation truths of the teaching of Jesus. In Old Testament days men had been taught to think of God as One, as the Creator, as the God of moral character, as the Ruler of History, as a God who was working out a great plan of redemption. Jesus accepted all this teaching about God, but He gathered up all that God had in earlier days told men about Himself under the sublime title "Father." What He wanted to do was to make men think of God as Love. He set forth love as that which best expressed the nature of God. God *is* Love. Love is the word which most clearly tells us what God is like. What lies behind this marvellous universe? What is the hidden power on which every thing depends? Love, said Jesus; a Heavenly Father, One who can be utterly trusted, One who is carrying out a great purpose of love for mankind. Jesus gave that answer with complete assurance, with no trace of hesitation. He could do that, because He had such a clear knowledge of the Father's heart.

"The Heavenly Father"—what thoughts of love and care the words suggest! But the doubt comes, whether it can be really true that the Great God cares for creatures so seemingly insignificant as men. But what did Jesus say? "Are not

two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows."[1] "Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."[2] Jesus bade us not be anxious, but trust the Father, committing our whole lives to His keeping, just as a little child will trust its parents.[3] How tender is the portrait of the Father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son![4] As we study what Jesus had to say about God we get a picture of One to whom every single human soul is very precious; who longs with a Father's love for His child that each soul may turn from sin and live in happy communion with God; whose heart is saddened when He sees His human children wilful and rebellious. As the blue sky overarches the earth, so does the love of God overarch human life. As the sunshine floods the world, making all things beautiful, so does God pour His blessings upon all that He has created.

Jesus emphasised the value of man's soul in God's eyes. For him a human being was a very sacred thing, and this for two reasons. First, each person was a unique child of God, made, as

[1] Matt. x. 29, 30.
[2] Matt. v. 44, 45.
[3] *Cf.* Luke xii. 22-32.
[4] *Cf.* Luke xv.

the Old Testament had said, in the divine image. For each life God had a special plan; each one represented, so to speak, a special thought in the mind of God. Secondly, to each God had entrusted the task of forming his own character. The Father leaves the children free to do what they will with their lives. They may live as loyal and obedient sons, or they may, like the prodigal, go into the far country. Do we always realise the tremendous gravity of such a saying as this—"For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?"[1] Jesus looked into the human soul and saw there infinite possibilities for good or ill. He wanted to make men ask themselves the question, What am I doing with my life?[2] He wanted to bring them face to face with the Father, who was longing to see all men live as loyal, happy children of God.

The Forgiving Love of God.

But, lest men should be frightened at the thought of their responsibility before God, He laid great stress upon the Father's forgiving love.[3] The Father's arms were always open to receive back a child who had wandered from the home. If the sinner was really repentant and really meant to do better, he could be sure that his Father would

[1] Matt. xvi. 26. [2] *Cf.* Matt. xvi. 24, 25.
[3] Luke xv. 20; Matt. xviii. 27.

welcome him. Was not God's heart just aching over the sinning child ? Was not the Father, short of using force, which is never Love's method, always trying in every way to win back the wanderer ? Was not His love seeking out, that it might save, the lost ?

A World-Wide Love.

No picture such as this of God had ever been given to the world before. There it stands, the Everlasting Gospel of the Love of God; and it is for you and me and all mankind. There is a splendid largeness about the teaching of Jesus on God. One Father in Heaven; one wide-flowing Love of God; one human family, in which distinctions of race and colour count for nothing. Men of all nations can say "Our Father," because they are all His children. He loves them all. He wills that each one should know Him as Father.

How the Thought of the Father Helps Us.

Jesus did not try to describe God in a number of difficult sentences. He did something far better. He showed men a *vision* of the Father. He helped men to see God for themselves, to find Him in their souls, in the experiences of daily life. He brought them out into the sunlight. Many of them had been rather like people who had lived all their lives in a cave, where the light was dim. What a wonderful change for such cave-dwellers

to be taken out into the sunshine! What a new world they would see! So it was when Jesus told men of the love of God. He gave a new setting to human life and its tasks. He showed men that the world in which they lived was a home; and that a *home-life*, the life of a son in his Father's house, was possible for all. Finally, how near to human life Jesus brings God. The Father! Why, I may find Him everywhere, in my work, my joys, my sorrows. The beauty of Nature witnesses to His presence. His artist's hand is seen in the grace of the flower or the markings of a shell. He speaks to us with unmistakable clearness in the charm of the little child. And all the while deep within us sounds His pleading voice, "My son, give me thy heart."

CHAPTER II

JESUS CHRIST

WHO is Jesus Christ? What are we to believe about Him? There cannot be any more important questions than these. For 1,900 years the world has been asking these questions, because it has been deeply interested in Jesus Christ. No other person has had the influence which He has had, or has so aroused the wonder and admiration of men. Just because He is so wonderful, we must expect to find difficulties when we try to explain Him. He is so far above us that our minds cannot hope to understand Him completely. But we must try to give the truest answers which we can to our questions.

THE MAN JESUS.

We read about the life of Jesus in the Gospels; and as we read, we say to ourselves, "This was a real Man." He was born of the Jewish race, spoke the language of His day, adopted the customs and habits of His time. We read that He was tired[1] and hungry[2] and thirsty.[3] He felt sorrow and wept.[4] He grew, as we all grow, from infancy

[1] John iv. 6. [2] Matt. iv. 2.
[3] John xix. 28. [4] John xi. 35; Luke xix. 41.

to manhood.[1] He asked questions, as we all do when we want to be informed about something we do not know.[2] There were matters on which He acknowledged His ignorance.[3] He had a real body like ours, which required food and sleep.[4] It was His habit to pray to His Father in Heaven.[5] It is clear that He felt He could not do His work without God's help.[6] He was tempted as we are.[7] Every day brought its difficulties and temptations, and He had to meet them. Certainly there was something mysterious about Him, which made the disciples wonder who He was; but when He walked about the streets and lanes with Peter and John and the rest, they knew that it was a real Man who was walking with them. The Christian Church has always taught that the Manhood of Jesus was real; but sometimes Christians have been only half-hearted in believing this. They have lost sight of His true humanity because they have been so impressed with His Godhead. We must never make that mistake. If He did not live a truly human life, then He can be no example to us. It is just because He was so entirely one of ourselves that we are drawn to Him, and feel that He understands us and knows all about us.[8]

Many feel a difficulty in thinking of the temptations of our Lord as real. They ask whether a

[1] Luke ii. 52.
[2] John xi. 34; Mark vi. 38.
[3] Matt. xxiv. 36.
[4] Luke viii. 24.
[5] Mark i. 35; Luke xxii. 41.
[6] John v. 19; xiv. 10.
[7] Matt. iv. 1-11.
[8] *Cf.* Heb. ii. 14; iv. 15; v. 8.

sinless being can really feel the force of temptation. If He was sinless, He was certainly free from what is one of our chief troubles—namely, the fact that temptation comes to us who have already yielded in the past, and so comes with greater power. Just because we have fallen the temptation finds an easier point of attack. Jesus never experienced personal failure and so never had to make the fresh start. Can He, then, be said to be one of ourselves?

In reply it may be asked whether He would not, just because He was sinless, feel the force of temptation more severely than we do. Never for a moment did He yield; but a pure soul like His must have been amazingly sensitive to all the assaults of evil, which we, because we are sinful, do not realise in their full horribleness. Is it not true that, the holier a man is, the more does he realise the hatefulness of evil? Jesus, because He was in perfect union with His Father, was able to repel all the assaults of temptation. Temptation never became sin in Him, as it does in us, because He instantly rejected it. But the struggle was real, and the temptations were real. They were also continuous throughout His earthly life. St. Luke quotes Him as saying to his disciples, "But ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations." If the temptations were not real, then His was not a truly human life, and He would not now have that living sympathy with us in our temptations. His was a true human experience.

Why we Call Jesus God.

Let us think of four reasons why we cannot give to Jesus any lower title than God.

(*a*) Consider first His character and the general impression which He makes on us as we read about Him. Was there ever anyone so utterly loving, so full of self-sacrifice, so ready to help others? "He went about doing good," is the simple record of His life. Love is the highest thing we know. Love is the very nature of God. In the love of Jesus we see God active in human life. Along with His amazing lovingness consider His sinlessness. People have said that He was not sinless; but the records describe one who never showed in His own soul any need of forgiveness. There is no trace that He ever did anything wrong. And He Himself claimed to forgive the sins of others. Could He have dared to make that claim, if He had known that He Himself needed to be forgiven? We believe Him to be the Saviour of men; we believe that He came to save men from sin. How could He save others, if He Himself was sinful? The New Testament is perfectly clear on this point, that He was without sin. All His life He was completely obedient to His Father. No other human being has ever been without sin.

(*b*) The disciples did not at first understand who He was. They began by thinking of Him as a great Teacher or Prophet. Then they thought of Him as the *Messiah*, the Christ (or Anointed

One). At that time the Jews were expecting the coming of some Being from Heaven, called Messiah, who should set up a new Kingdom of God on earth. But it is not long before we find them thinking of Him as the eternal Son of God. In his earliest epistle, written less than thirty years after the Crucifixion, St. Paul "brackets" Him with God, and speaks of Him as God. What had happened to make him so think of Him? The Resurrection had happened. The Risen Jesus had appeared to St. Paul on the Damascus road.[1] Jesus who had died on the Cross had proved Himself the conqueror of death, and had risen again. The disciples were sure that He had risen. In their earliest preaching we find them proclaiming the fact.[2] The Christian Church is built on the belief that Jesus really did rise again. Are we to call one who rose from the dead and conquered death only a Man? Must we not call Him God?

(*c*) For 1,900 years Jesus has been attracting men, drawing them to Himself as the magnet draws the steel. All this time the Church has been growing and spreading in every part of the world. Why? Because men have found that Jesus can help them, can make a difference to them in their daily lives. Someone will say, "But how can One who lived 1,900 years ago help me now?" If anyone asks that question, it proves that he does not understand who Jesus is. Jesus Christ is *alive now*. He came from God. He lived His

[1] Acts ix. [2] Acts ii. 32; iii. 15.

human life. He went back to God, and is now trying to help us by giving us His power. The story of Christianity is just the story of how Jesus Christ through all the centuries has been giving life to those who were willing to receive it.

We may be helped to understand this better if we think of the illustration which He Himself used when He was talking to His disciples not long before He was crucified. He was speaking of the Vine and its branches. If you cut a branch off a tree, it dies because the sap of the tree no longer flows in it. Jesus wished to teach that He could be to His followers what the vine-stem is to the branches. He could be their source of life. And that is what Christians have found, that they have received life from Jesus. The truth of this can be proved if only we will take Jesus at His word, give ourselves to Him, and ask Him to unite us with Himself. St. Paul had found out this truth in his own experience, and his letters are full of it. Read them, and see how often he uses the words " in Christ."[1] He means that a true Christian is in some mysterious way joined so closely to Christ, that Christ's life enters into him. Christian discipleship is not simply a following of Jesus, but it is the receiving of life from Jesus. Can we now deny the title " God " to One who through all these hundreds of years has been giving life to men, shaping their characters, enabling

[1] *Cf.* Rom. viii. 1-11; 2 Cor. v. 17; Gal. ii. 20; Eph. iii. 14-19 and iv.

them to become "new creatures"? In judging of the Person of Jesus Christ we cannot leave out of account the work in the human heart which He has done and still is doing.

(*d*) Once more, as we read the story of His life, we see that He claimed to stand to God in a special relationship. He spoke as One who had special knowledge of God. He never shows any uncertainty when He talks about His Father. He speaks with complete confidence about the Father's character and purposes. The thought of His Father is always in His mind. His first recorded saying as a Boy is, "Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?" His last word on the Cross was, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Now men have said that He was mistaken in this claim which He made; that He was just a man like ourselves; only, of course, an especially good man. But we cannot judge of this claim unless we take all the facts into account. We must see what other reasons we have for calling Him God before we can decide whether He was right in thinking that He stood to God in a special relationship. Some of these reasons have just been mentioned. This, at any rate, must be granted: that what He taught about God has given the world a new vision of God, has appealed to men in a remarkable way; and the world shows no signs of outgrowing His teaching or setting it aside.

The Son of God.

We cannot, then, stop at calling Him Man. If we are to do justice to what He was and did, we must go on to call Him God. What the Christian Church believes about Him is stated in the Creeds. In the Apostles' Creed He is called God's "only Son our Lord," who rose from the dead, ascended into Heaven, and will come again to judge all men. In the Nicene Creed (in the Communion Service) He is described as "the only-begotten Son of God . . . being of one substance with the Father." He is called "Very God of Very God," and it is stated that He existed with God before He came to earth. In the Athanasian Creed (printed after Evening Prayer) He is called "Perfect God and Perfect Man," and the following statement is made: "For the right faith is, that we believe and confess: that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man." If anyone asks, How can He be at one and the same time both God and Man? we cannot satisfactorily answer the question. In early days the Church tried for a long time to deal with this problem. It had to meet the attacks of those who said, either that Jesus was not true Man, or that He was not really God. It came to the conclusion that He was both, and that unless we believed this, we should be missing some of the truth about Him.

"God and Man"; but it is better to say, "God *as* Man." What Christians believe is this, that

God came to earth as Man in the Person of Jesus Christ. God, wanting to give us a revelation of Himself, and wanting to help men live a better life, came Himself among men as a human being. Jesus was God, but He was God shown in a truly human life. If I want to build a church, but have only wood with which to build it, I can make the church beautiful, so far as wood allows me to do so. If I had stone and marble and silver and gold I could build a much more beautiful church, because I should not be limited in the way I am limited if I have only wood. In the same kind of way, if God chose to reveal Himself through a human body and human mind, He could show only so much of Himself as could be shown through the life of a man. He could do only those things which His material allowed Him to do. This is a very important point, because, in our desire to defend the Godhead of Jesus, we may easily make His manhood unreal. No human being knows everything, and Jesus did not know everything. He tells us so Himself, and we have already seen that He asked for information. No human being can do everything; and there were limits to what Jesus could do. In becoming Man, Jesus became real man; and this meant that He laid aside much of the power and knowledge and glory which He had before He became Man. As St. Paul says, He "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant."

"Come Unto Me."

No man who has ever come face to face with Jesus can be the same as he was before he knew about Him. Why? Because in Jesus he has seen the perfect human life, and he knows how very far short his own life comes of that standard. Jesus shows us both what we are and what we ought to be. He reveals us to ourselves. Now some people are afraid of being shown the truth about themselves. Like insects which love the dark, they run away from the light. Jesus had some words to say about this kind of person. And indeed it is humiliating to be shown up in this way. But surely it is better to be honest with ourselves, and to know the naked truth about ourselves, than to go through life self-deceived; and then when life is over to have to face God's judgment, when, whether we will or not, the truth must come out. Let us, however, look again at this Jesus who sends His flashlight into our hearts. There is love in His face; there is a great tenderness in His voice as He says, "Come unto Me." Suppose that I do come into His presence, very ashamed of myself, what will He do? Will He send me away with a stern word of condemnation? Not unless He has entirely changed from what He was in the Gospel story. No; He will welcome me, and forgive me, and speak a word of encouragement. And more than that, He will make me an offer. He will offer to give me His strength to enable me to do better

in the future. I need not be afraid of Jesus, if I am really wanting to live aright. He is the Revealer of my sin; yes, but He can save me from my sin, by pouring into me His strong life. He shows me what I am; yes, but He also shows me what by His help I may become. He stands over against my life, in judgment, but in love. He just longs to forgive me, and bless me, and send me out to work in the world for Him.

Life is full of difficulties; it does not grow easier as we become older. Is there any one of us who would not be glad of a companion on our way, wiser and nobler than we are, who could help us? There is such a companion; and it is Jesus Christ. He *knows* the road, because He once walked it. He has the *power* to help, because He is the eternal Son of God. He has the *will* to help, because the whole purpose of His coming was to save men from the sin which was dragging them down. Life becomes an entirely different thing for one who gives himself whole-heartedly to Jesus Christ. What it becomes we can find out only by trying. Those who have tried have never regretted the experiment.

CHAPTER III

THE HOLY SPIRIT

THE teaching of Jesus about the Father shows, as we have seen, that God is not to be thought of as far away in some distant heaven, but as near at hand, and as active towards men. When we think of the Holy Spirit we are thinking of God's activity. A great man once complained that "God does nothing." It is not true. God is always doing things. The stars move in their courses, the seeds grow, man lives and thinks, only because God's Spirit is ceaselessly active. We cannot, however, here discuss the ways in which the Spirit of God works in Nature; we must confine ourselves to His work among men. Most of what the New Testament has to say about the Spirit is concerned with His work in human society and in the heart of the individual.

The Holy Spirit, then, is God at work now; but when a Christian speaks of the Holy Spirit, he thinks of Him *in connection with Jesus Christ*. He thinks of the Holy Spirit as having specially to do with Christ's work. Simply to speak of the Holy Spirit as God at work is not enough. We must add that He is God acting with Jesus, or in and through Jesus. This will become clearer later

on. May we not for the present describe the Holy Spirit as being the loving, personal activity of the Father and of Jesus Christ in our souls? The Holy Spirit is God, who is our Father and our Saviour, coming so close to us that He moves in our hearts and dwells within us.

How the Disciples First Experienced the Spirit.

Let us see what happened shortly after Jesus left the earth. We read that He told the Apostles to wait in Jerusalem till they received the Holy Spirit.[1] Jesus was going away from them. He had left them a work to do; they were to preach the Gospel and spread His Kingdom; they were to build up a Christian Church or society.[2] It was an immense task; and He Himself was no longer going to be with them in bodily presence to encourage and advise them. How could they hope to carry out this work? But God never sets men a task without providing the help needed for it. And so in this case God provided the help by sending the Holy Spirit. Picture the disciples waiting in Jerusalem, praying, expecting, wondering what would happen.[3] Then suddenly the great day came, the day we call Whitsunday, which the Jews called Pentecost. The whole company of disciples were together in the Upper Room, and

[1] Acts i. 4. [2] Matt. xxviii. 19; Acts i. 8.
[3] Acts i. 13, 14.

there came upon them the gift of the Spirit. We can read the story for ourselves in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It is difficult for us who live 1,900 years after the event to understand completely everything which happened. But these things are clear and certain. The disciples became changed men. They had been sad and puzzled because Jesus was leaving them; now they are glad and happy. They had been wondering if they could possibly carry out their big task; now we see them boldly preaching and spreading the good news.[1] Power came to them from God; and they understood that, though Jesus had left the earth, He was still with them, still present, though unseen, to guide and help them through the Spirit.[2] The Acts of the Apostles is just the story of what these men did in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Coming of Jesus and the Work of the Spirit.

People have often asked whether the Holy Spirit was not active in the world before that first Whitsunday; and if He was, whether He began then to work in a different way. Of course, He has been at work always. The Old Testament speaks of His work.[3] He has always been active, teaching men, giving them high thoughts, warning them

[1] Acts iv. 31; v. 41, 42. [2] *Cf.* Matt. xxviii. 20.
[3] *E.g.*, Gen. i. 2; Isa. xi. 2; lxi. 1.

in conscience. We owe the Old Testament itself to the Holy Spirit. It was He who taught Moses and the psalmists and prophets truths about God which they could never have learned unaided. But after Jesus had come, the Holy Spirit was able to work with new power and in new ways, because He was able to make use of all that Jesus was, and had done. If you were giving a botany lesson on a rose in winter, when there were no roses to be had, you would have to teach by drawing pictures and diagrams of the rose. But the class would learn more, and what they learned would go home more, if each child had a real rose in his hand, and could test what the teacher said by examining the rose for himself. The presence of the real rose would make all the difference to the force and interest of the lesson. In the same kind of way, the fact that Jesus had lived and taught and died and risen would make all the difference to the work of the Holy Spirit, because He would be able to use these facts to bring home to men's minds what He wanted to teach. Nor is there any reason why we should not believe that God can begin to act in a new way at a certain time.

God surely can vary His method of acting. Before there were any men on this earth He could not have acted in the way we call forgiveness, for animals cannot sin and do not need to be forgiven. When man appeared, then God began to act in the new ways suitable for man's training. And so here. When Jesus Christ had come and done His

work, God could begin to act in the new way which we call the way of the Holy Spirit.

God and Man.

God, through His Spirit, is seeking to teach men truth and to help them to live as children of God should live. God, having created men, does not leave them alone to make their way through life unaided. He offers them the help of the Holy Spirit. Jesus set the pattern of a perfect human life for us to follow. But the pattern is so far beyond us that without help none of us could hope to reach it. God knew that; and so, when Jesus left the earth, He sent His Holy Spirit to enable us to do what, without His aid, we could not do. Pattern and Power: the Pattern without the Power would be of little use. The simplest way in which we can describe the work of the Holy Spirit among men is to say that He is trying to shape us into the likeness of Jesus Christ. He wants to make us like Jesus. We are, then, to think of God as a holy, loving Spirit, who comes very close to each one of us, who longs to dwell in our hearts that He may drive out what is evil, and implant noble thoughts and good desires. He can never use force to make us good. You do not turn a thief into an honest man by tying his hands so that he cannot steal. We do not become good until we freely choose of ourselves to be good God cannot force us to be like Jesus. But He offers to help us to be

like Jesus by giving us His divine help, this help which we call the power of the Holy Spirit. Anyone who will read carefully Psalm 139 will see how the Spirit of God is always close to us, trying to help us. And what God wants of us is that we should open our hearts to receive His Spirit, and pray the psalmist's prayer—"Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any way of wickedness in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."[1]

The Holy Spirit in my Heart.

"Holy" is the word on which we must fix our minds, because it gives us the key to the Spirit's work. It is He who shows us our faults, who makes us feel ashamed when we have done wrong. He is like a searchlight lighting up all the dark corners of a room. Because He is holy He hates sin; and He wants to make us hate sin too. It is an awful thought (a thought full of awe) that we live in the presence of One who searches us through and through, and knows all that is within us, even our secret thoughts and desires. But if He searches us in this way, it is only that He may help us. He who shows us our sin can give us His power to conquer sin. This is why He is called the "Comforter"—that is, the Strengthener.[2] It is just His work to implant in us new desires and to give us strength to carry them out. St. Paul writes

[1] Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24. [2] John xiv. 26.

much about the Holy Spirit in his Epistles. He had found out in his own experience what He could do. He knew that there was such a thing as being "led by the Spirit of God."[1] What are the marks of a life which is so led? In the first place, the Spirit-led man is free from the tyranny of sin and evil habit. He is no longer a slave to his passions; he is learning to be master of himself.[2] Next, he is aware of a power not his own coming into his life, the power of God.[3] Just as the stream is fed from springs far up in the hills, so the Spirit-led man is in touch with an unfailing supply of divine strength. Thirdly, his life and conduct will be marked by certain definite qualities. St. Paul gives a list of the things which he calls "the fruit of the Spirit."[4] Among them are love, kindness, long-suffering. The Spirit-led man, in a word, will be more and more growing into the likeness of Jesus. Once more, he will be on the watch for any new thing which God may want to teach him.[5] He will keep spiritually alert; he will never feel that he cannot grow better, or that he has learned all about God which there is to learn.[6] He will be a man who is *alive* in the things of religion.

[1] Rom. viii. 14.
[2] Rom. viii. 2-11.
[3] Eph. iii. 16.
[4] Gal. v. 22, 23.
[5] *Cf.* 1 Cor. ii. 10-16.
[6] Phil. iii. 13, 14.

The Holy Spirit and the Fellowship.

In writing about the Holy Spirit, St. Paul constantly reminds his readers that they are members of a society. They are not just isolated individuals; they belong to many groups, the family, the nation, the Church. This is true of us all; and no Christian can neglect his duties to these wider groups. The Holy Spirit is not only the helper of the individual; He is the Spirit of the society. One of the first things which strike us as we read the story of that first Whitsunday is the way in which those early Christians felt they were all one body. They were a band of brothers; and they were filled with a common spirit. They marked their oneness by meeting together to share in the Holy Communion, when they all partook of the one loaf.[1] St. Paul draws a wonderful picture of the body and its many members.[2] There is one life of the whole body, in which each part shares. The Spirit, says the Apostle, is He who makes the society of Christians one. He gives to each his special gifts of mind, or bodily powers, or whatever the gift may be, and bids each use the gift for the good of the whole. No Christian, in other words, can be selfish. He must think of others, work for others, and do all he can to make the life of his society as sound and vigorous as it can be. We can see why the Holy Spirit creates fellowship. It is

[1] Acts ii. 44-46; iv. 32.
[2] 1 Cor. xii. should be carefully read.

because He is the Spirit of Love, the Christ-like Spirit. Love always tries to break down barriers and to unite men. Where the power of love is at work, there you have a force which is continually making for fellowship. Take this thought of the Spirit and the fellowship, and see what it means for us today. It means that as members of a Christian Church we must care for our church, and our parish, and be ready to do what we can to make the Church's life strong. It means that we must put away race hatreds. These race problems are becoming more difficult each year. We must look at them with the eyes of Jesus, and remember that God's Spirit is saying to us—"These men are your brothers: they are all members of the one Body." It means that we must try to banish that spirit of class hatred and class rivalry which causes so much trouble in our social and industrial life. In a word, it means that we must always be thinking of others, and never merely of ourselves. What a different world it would be if we all let the Holy Spirit do His work in our hearts, driving out those hateful tempers of jealousy and strife and the despising of others.

A Motto.

St. Paul says: "Know ye not that ye are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" There is a motto for us all. I am a house or temple in which God's Spirit wants to dwell.

Could I invite the King to my house if it were unswept and dirty? Can God's Spirit dwell in me if I am making no effort to keep my heart and mind clean? A temple of God; sacred because made by Him—I am that. In that temple His Spirit seeks to dwell. But I can shut Him out, or admit Him. Which is it to be?

CHAPTER IV

THE CROSS

If we had been told that the Son of God was coming to earth as a man, and we had been asked to say what kind of a life we thought He would live, we should never have made Him die on a Cross with a thief on each side of Him. We should have felt that such a death would be unworthy of One so glorious. Yet Jesus died on a Cross, and all down the ages Christians have found the greatest help and comfort in the fact. The Cross of Jesus Christ is a very mysterious thing; we can never hope to understand all its meaning. But we must see to it that it has some meaning for ourselves; for we may be sure there is something wrong with our religion if the Cross is no help to us, but only a strange puzzle.

God's Love in the Cross.

Now God is Love, and all that God does flows from His Love. That is our starting-point; and no account of the Cross can be true which does not see in it an act of the Love of God. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten

Son."[1] In all that Jesus did, including His death on Calvary, we are to see the Love of God in action. Other views of the Cross have been held, and perhaps are still held; but they are not true views. For example, it has been taught that God, angry with men because of their sins, was punishing Jesus, who bore for us the penalty due to sin. But is it fair to punish One who is innocent? No earthly judge would allow B to be punished instead of A, even if B were willing to take A's place in the dock. And how could God be punishing Jesus at the very moment when He was most loyally obeying His Father's will?

It has been said again, that there are two sides to God's nature. He is Love, but He is also Justice. His Love wanted to forgive men freely; but His Justice said, "No; they cannot be forgiven, unless Jesus pays in full on the Cross the penalty of sin." But we cannot rightly think of God as being cut in two, as it were, in this fashion, so that one part of His nature is in opposition to another part. We must put away all thoughts of a wrathful God being appeased by the sacrifice of Jesus. The Cross witnesses indeed, as we shall see, to the holiness of God; but we cannot think of that holiness being satisfied because Jesus bore a heavy penalty. The Cross, then, flows from the Love of God.

[1] John iii. 16.

The Cross and Human Sin.

But what about human sin? What has the Cross to do with sin, if we must not think of Jesus as being punished on it for our misdeeds? That the Cross had to do with sin is plainly taught in the New Testament,[1] and has always been believed by Christians. Let us see if we can go a little more deeply into this question.

We must begin by asserting that sin is a great reality. It is the dark blot which lies all over human history. We all of us not only do wrong things (sins), but we have within us a kind of poison (sin) which spoils our characters, and, if it is not checked, ruins our lives. There is no one who is not sinful.[2] Now sin is hateful to God. God is Love, but He is *holy* Love. God can come to no terms whatever with sin. Just as fire cannot dwell with water, because the two are in absolute opposition, so God reacts against sin with the whole force of His nature. The picture which we see when we look out on human life is this. We see men and women, who ought to be living as obedient children of God, misusing the power of choice which God gave them. They choose evil instead of good; they refuse to be loyal to God; they spoil God's purpose for them. What is God to do in such a situation? He loves these sinful people,

[1] *Cf.* Rom. v. 8; Heb. x. 12; 1 Pet. ii. 24.
[2] Rom. iii. 23.

because they are His children, and because He is Love through and through. But He cannot treat their sin as if it did not matter, because He is a holy God, who hates sin. He would be untrue to Himself if He took no notice of their sins, or lightly forgave them. All the while He is longing to see them do better, and His heart of love is wounded every time any one of them sins. What is God to do? Being Love, He must want to help them; but at the same time He can give them only the best kind of help. Now the best kind of help will be that which makes them in their turn hate sin and want to do better. What they need is to become changed men and women. Did Jesus by dying on the Cross give them this best kind of help? Surely He did. Let us see how.

1. First, if we look at Jesus on the Cross merely as an example for us to follow, we see in His giving of Himself human love at its height. Our imagination is stirred, our heroism is called out by the sight of one of our human race showing such a marvellous spirit of self-sacrificing love. In our best moments we feel that we are summoned to make all the sacrifice we can for our fellow-men.

2. Secondly, He showed that there was no limit to God's Love. God's Love was so great that it was ready, for the sake of helping men, to endure pain and suffering and death. If Jesus had not died, we could have imagined a love which might have gone further. But how could love go further than by being ready even to die?

3. Thirdly, you cannot help a person to be a better man from a distance. You must come close to him, enter into his life, give him your real sympathy. You must make friends with him, take trouble with him, show him you are ready to share his burden with him. This is what Jesus did. It is as if God were saying to us, " See, you have made a sorry mess of your lives. I will come Myself to help you set matters right." Down into human life came Jesus, right into the middle of all its shame and wretchedness, sharing our burden, trying to help us, shrinking from nothing, not even from death.

4. But at what tremendous cost He did all this ! The Cross shows us what it cost God to redeem the world. It is the *cost* of it all about which we have to think. So hateful is sin to God, so deeply does God long to see it removed from the lives of His children, that He was ready in the Person of Jesus Christ to bear all the burden and shame of sin, in the hope that men, seeing what it cost Him, might be moved to repentance. In the Cross we see the suffering that human sin causes God.

The Cross a Sacrifice.

The New Testament speaks of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice for sin; and the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is specially concerned with the Cross as a sacrifice, and spends much time in showing how Christ's sacrifice of Himself differed

from the sacrifices of slain animals which were offered in Old Testament times. In what sense can we call Christ's death a sacrifice? We have seen that we cannot think of it as a sacrifice to appease an angry God. What Jesus offered on the Cross was the sacrifice of obedience and love. He gave Himself without reserve for mankind. He perfectly obeyed His Father's will. The only sacrifice acceptable to God is the spiritual sacrifice of a repentant and obedient heart. There was no value in offering God a slain animal, except in so far as the animal was the outward expression of some real sacrifice of heart and will which the worshipper was making inwardly. All this is made clear in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Christ's sacrifice on the Cross was then the sacrifice of One who was utterly loyal to God, who was perfectly obedient, perfectly loving, and gave Himself for our redemption. He sacrificed Himself for us, that we, drawn by His love, might offer ourselves, our souls and bodies, as a living sacrifice to our Father in Heaven.

The Cross and Ourselves.

Let us now as sinners come face to face with the Cross, and see what it should mean for us. But let us remember that we shall best understand the Cross when we are on our knees, when we come very humbly to our Father, and own up to Him the wrong things we have done and ask Him to forgive

us. No one will ever understand the Cross who treats it simply as a problem to be solved by the head. We have to go deeper than that. The Cross, if it speaks to us at all, speaks to the very depths of us, to heart and will, to the secret places where we are alone with God. This is its message.

1. It shows us what a terrible thing sin is, and what it means to a perfectly holy God. On the Cross we see Jesus bearing what we may call the doom of sin. God was not punishing Him; but God meant us to see that there is a judgment on sin. Jesus bowed His head to the consequences which sin involves. The Cross spells the holiness of God and His hatred of sin.

2. But if that is the dark side of the Cross its bright side is that it is a revelation of the exceeding love of God. Many a sinner, coming up to the foot of the Cross, has said to himself: "My sin is of a piece with the sin of the men who crucified Him. By my sin I have been hurting God. I have been rebellious and disloyal. But see how God loves me. Why, He sent His Son to die for me. If God so loves me, I cannot go on sinning. I must turn and try to make amends for my past. I cannot resist the appeal of a Love like that."

3. When in *Pilgrim's Progress* Christian reached the foot of the Cross, we read that his burden fell from his back. He was carrying about with him the load of past sins and of a guilty conscience. We have all carried that load. Thousands are now carrying it and finding it very heavy. But the

Cross tells us that God is ready to forgive us, and to welcome us back, unworthy though we are, the moment we really repent. Thus it encourages us to make a new start, and assures us that God will treat us as the Father in the parable treated the Prodigal Son. The fact that when He was crucified Jesus showed no resentment, but endured patiently what men put upon Him, and prayed that His murderers might be forgiven, makes us sure that God will in love forgive us, if we turn to Him in penitence. The Cross is the pledge of our pardon. No wonder that the Cross has proved such a power in the history of Christianity! No wonder that every day the Saviour, hanging there, is drawing men to Himself. To each one of us Jesus is saying from the Cross: "See My love for you; see the hatefulness of sin; see how God longs for you to come back out of the far country." This is the meaning of such a text as "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin." The repentant sinner, drawn by the love of Christ on the Cross, realises that there is cleansing power in that sacrifice. That love cleanses him by making him turn away from sin. He becomes in Christ a new man.

A Cross in our Hearts.

Christ did for us on the Cross something which we could never have done for ourselves. But the very fact that someone else did something for us a

long time ago is apt to puzzle people. They say: "I cannot see how I can be affected by what another person did. How is the fact that Jesus died on the Cross going to save me? What, indeed, has it to do with me?"

Well, unless we *make* it have something to do with us, it will remain for us just a fact of past history, with which we have very little concern. "Jesus died for me." That is a glorious truth. But it does not mean that *therefore I have nothing more to do*. Why, I have everything to do. I have to plant a cross in my own life.[1] I have to die to sin.[2] I have to crucify what is evil in me.[3] I have to catch the spirit of the Cross and make it my own.

Here comes in the great truth, of which an earlier chapter has spoken, that Jesus Christ is now alive. The Crucified Christ is the Living and Ascended Christ. And, as He once died *for* us, so now He can live *in* us, and help us to understand the Cross, and grow into its spirit of self-sacrifice and hatred of sin. The Cross does not stand alone. After Good Friday came Easter and the Ascension; and then later Whitsunday and the giving of the Holy Spirit. We must take them all together, and remember that the Sufferer on the Cross, weak and helpless, became the Risen Lord and Life-giving Christ. He has all power. He can give us His life. He can make us strong to conquer

[1] Matt. xvi. 24. [2] Rom. vi. 2, 11.
[3] Rom. vi. 6.

sin. As St. Paul puts it, by His help and united to Him we can die daily to sin, and daily rise to a new life of holiness.

The Mark on our Foreheads.

Upon us was put the mark of the Cross when we were baptised; and the words were said, "In token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under his banner, against sin, the world, and the devil; and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." What kind of a person should a follower of a Crucified Saviour be? A soldier and a servant. A soldier in a campaign under the greatest of Captains; fighting against evil within his own heart and in the world around. A soldier who keeps himself fit for the campaign, who does not mind roughing it,[1] who keeps his body in control,[2] his weapons clean and bright.[3] And a servant, ready for the humblest duty, or for a great task, if his Master calls him to that. His object is to serve his Master, and he can do that by serving his brethren.[4] To care for others; to be ready to sacrifice oneself for them; to be ready to give up things for the sake of Jesus Christ;[5] that is what the spirit of the Cross means. It matters not if we cannot solve all the difficulties connected

[1] 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.
[2] 1 Cor. ix. 27.
[3] *Cf.* Eph. vi. 13-17.
[4] Matt. xxv. 40.
[5] Phil. iii. 7, 8.

with the strange fact that God's Son died on a Cross. Let us try to live out the Cross in our own lives. Then we shall more and more want to thank God for it; and we shall want to prove our gratitude by what we think, and do, and are.

CHAPTER V

THE BIBLE

Two of the first questions we have to ask about the Bible are, What is it ? and How did it come to be ? Until we have some general idea of what the Bible contains and of how it took its present shape, we shall not be able to appreciate fully its wonderful character.

What is the Bible ?

The word " Bible " is the English form of a Greek word meaning " books." Though bound in one volume, the Bible is really a whole literature. Its books are of very different kinds, and were composed at very different dates. A period of more than a thousand years separates the earliest from the latest of its writings. The Bible contains books of history, books of law, poetry, collections of proverbs, prophecies, epistles or letters, four Gospels, and ends with that strange writing called the *Revelation*. The styles of the various writers differ greatly, just as do the styles of modern authors. The value of the different parts of the Bible is not the same. For example, we should all agree that the long lists of names in *Chronicles* are not as valuable or helpful as the Psalms or

the Epistles of St. Paul. We make a great mistake if we think of all the parts of the Bible as being on the same level of worth.

The Old and New Testaments.

This varied literature falls into two main divisions, which we name the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament tells the story of a particular people called the Israelites, but tells it in a special way. It is concerned with the *religious* history of that people. It tells how God chose them, guided them, trained and taught them. The Old Testament is a religious literature. It looks at human life through God's eyes. These Israelites had a genius for religion, and in matters religious have been the teachers of the world.

In the New Testament we have in the Gospels the story of Jesus Christ, and an account of the impression He made upon those who knew Him. In the *Acts of the Apostles* we read about the beginnings of the Christian Church; while in the Epistles we have the letters of the great missionary St. Paul, and of other Christian leaders, such as St. John, St. Peter, and St. James.

The Old Testament is closely connected with the New Testament. The one prepared the way for the other. What God taught the Israelites about Himself was leading up to the fuller revelation which He gave in Jesus Christ. If we would understand

the Bible, we must remember that the Old and New Testaments are two successive stages in God's education of man. We may put it in this way: in the Old Testament we see the dawn of God's truth, and we see the light gradually becoming brighter, as the people learned more about God. In the New Testament the dawn has become the brilliance of midday.

How Did it Come to Be?

The Bible did not drop ready-made from Heaven, but took shape gradually. It is the work of men, but, as we shall see later, of men who were taught by God. A nation does not possess a literature until it has reached a certain stage of civilisation; and it was not till the Hebrews settled in Palestine that they began to write their national history. Till then they had mainly traditions about their past, handed on by word of mouth. We do not know how early they had any written documents, but it was not till some eight or nine centuries before Christ that they began to write the story of the nation in a regular way. Having once begun, they went on writing. At various later dates other writers, or groups of writers, either revised what had been written earlier, or composed a fresh account of the history of the nation. This explains why we often find in the Old Testament double narratives of the same event. Thus there are

two accounts of Creation,[1] two of the Flood,[2] (though these are combined into one), and in *Kings* and *Chronicles* two long historical documents covering much the same ground, but written from different points of view.

But it was not only history which was written. Poets were composing their songs of praise. Prophets were giving their burning messages from God. Wise men were uttering proverbs and pithy sayings about life and its conduct. A varied religious literature was growing up. As the nation's experience of God became richer, so the writings which recorded that experience became more numerous.

Many centuries went to the making of the Old Testament, but all the books of the New Testament were written probably within the first hundred years after the coming of Christ. The writers of the New Testament stood much nearer to the events which they describe than did many of the writers of the Old Testament.

[1] One is in Gen. i.-ii. 3; the other in ii. 4 to end.

[2] In Gen. vi. 19, 20, two of each kind of animal are ordered to be taken into the Ark. In vii. 2, seven clean and two unclean are the numbers. In one narrative the waters "prevail" for 150 days, then gradually decrease, the Flood lasting one year, eleven days (*cf.* vii. 11 with viii. 14). In the other story they increase for forty days and forty nights, then disappear in twenty-one days, the Flood thus lasting sixty-one days (*cf.* vii. 17; viii. 6-12.)

The Final Collection.

There were other Hebrew religious books besides those we have in the Old Testament,[1] and there were other Christian writings besides those in the New Testament. What we have in both Testaments is a *selection* of religious literature. What happened was this. Gradually in both cases certain books came to be recognised as being for various reasons of special value. It was not always easy to decide which books should be included in the list of official Scriptures which was being drawn up. But in the course of time the final selection was made. By about the year 100 B.C. the Canon (as it is called) of the Old Testament was complete; and by A.D. 397 the Canon of the New Testament was settled. Ever since then these books, which make up our Bible, have been regarded as the official Scriptures of the Church.

The Divine Message.

But if the Bible were only what we have so far described it as being, it would not have become, as it has, the most important book in the world. The Bible is a collection of religious books coming from a people called at first the Hebrews, and later the Jews. But the question at once arises, How

[1] Some, for example, are in what is called the Apocrypha, which is sometimes included in our Bibles. Some lessons in church are taken from the Apocrypha.

was it that this nation was able to produce such marvellous writings? No other nation produced anything of equal spiritual value. Why was it that the writers of the Old Testament had such a rich religious experience, and reached such a lofty conception of God? The answer is that God was teaching them. That is the explanation which they themselves gave. They said that God was revealing to them the religious truths which they were learning. The prophets, for example, insisted that their message was given them by God. "Thus saith the Lord" is the common phrase which they use. And so the Bible, though written by men, contains a record of a revelation given by God. There is a human element in the Bible; but there is also a divine element; and it is this latter which makes it the precious thing it is. God wanted mankind to know about Himself. He chose a special people and gradually educated them by His Spirit, teaching them things which they could never have discovered by themselves. They, in their turn, became the religious teachers of the world. God taught this people in two ways. First, He taught them by their history, by what happened to them. He was guiding their life, and helping them to see what religious lessons their history contained. Secondly, He selected from the nation certain individuals, and showed them His truth. A Moses, a Samuel, an Isaiah, all the various poets who wrote the Psalms—each of these was being taught by God. We speak of

them as "inspired" writers. Inspiration means "inbreathing." An inspired writer is one whose heart and mind have been touched and illuminated by God's Spirit.

How the Bible "Finds" us.

What proof, you may ask, can be given that the Bible contains this message from God? The proof is to be found in the way in which the Bible meets the deepest needs of the human soul. Its words are centuries old, but they are as fresh today as when they were first written. Men turn to the Bible in sorrow, loneliness, joy, doubt, and find in its pages just what they need. When we have sinned, can we read our Bible and not feel how its message comes home to us, making us ashamed? Do not we find ourselves in the Bible? Is it not a mirror in which we see ourselves with all our faults? Think also of the picture it gives of the love of God, His patience with us, His sorrow when we do wrong, His readiness to forgive us. Is all this the invention of men? Must not a book which contains spiritual teaching so rich, and so exactly suited to the needs of our soul, have come from men whom God was specially teaching? It is because the Bible "finds" us in the very depths of our being that we call it God's word. "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and

marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. iv. 12). The Bible, too, makes a universal appeal to men. Its spiritual message is suited to men of every race and every condition of life. Above all, it contains the story of Jesus Christ, and He is the Light and Life of the world.

The Bible, in a word, is the great textbook of religious experience. All our experiences of sin and repentance and hope, all the deep things of our religious life, are to be found in its pages. Must we not call it God's library?

Some Difficulties about the Bible.

We have seen that there is both a human and a divine element in the Bible. If we remember that its writers were men like ourselves, we shall be the better able to explain some of the things which puzzle people about this Book. When God taught a Biblical writer religious truth, He did not *dictate* a message to him. He stirred his heart, inspired him with lofty thoughts; but He left the man to write down in his own way what he had to say. Nor did God, in teaching him, tell him truths of science or history which put him far in advance of the men of his own day. The Bible teaches us *religious* truth. Its writers knew no more science or history than was generally known at that time. We need not, therefore, be surprised

if we find that the account of creation in *Genesis* does not agree with modern science, or if it can be shown that there are some historical mistakes in the Bible. Nor need we be troubled, if we find out that there are legends in the Bible which are not historically accurate. Let us remember that in every national literature there are legends about the distant past and bits of folklore which are not strictly true. This Jewish national literature contains all this kind of popular writing. There is the story of Balaam's ass speaking, and of Jonah being swallowed by the whale. Both these stories are of the nature of fables or allegories. But this is the point: both contain moral and religious lessons of great value. They are "religiously true" even if they are not "historically true." In so ancient and so varied a literature, much of which deals with events happening centuries before they were written down, we should naturally expect to find both legend and folklore. The answer to all this kind of difficulty is that the Bible comes to teach us religion, and not science or history in up-to-date methods.

A Gradual Revelation.

There is another class of difficulty which troubles some. There are passages in the Old Testament which seem to give a view of God which contradicts what the New Testament says about Him. For

example, we read (1 Sam. xv. 3) that God told Saul to slay all the Amalekites, "man and woman, infant and suckling," and we wonder how the God whom Jesus revealed as perfect Love could have ordered this. God never gave any such order. Samuel thought He did; but that is a very different matter. God changes not. He was not a fierce God in Old Testament times, and then later a loving God. Whenever we meet with a difficulty of this kind, whenever we find the Old Testament approving of what we as Christians know to be a lower standard of morality, let us remember that men could not grasp the whole of God's truth at once. The Israelites had to be educated gradually. Little by little, as they could understand it, did the truth about God become plain to them. You cannot teach a child all that you can teach a man. This nation passed through a long period of childhood. The real wonder is how it outgrew its childish thoughts of God and how in the prophets we find a thought of God which comes very near to what Jesus taught about Him. "First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." First the dawn, then the sun mounting the sky and the earth growing lighter, then the full glory of the noonday. We often make difficulties for ourselves over the Bible, because we will not apply common sense to it.

Jesus Christ the Final Truth.

The revelation which God had been giving gradually reached its fullest expression in Jesus Christ. This fact means that for us the New Testament is the final standard of truth. We must think of God as Jesus thought of Him, not as He was thought of in the earlier days, when He had not revealed Himself so completely. Much of what the Old Testament says of God, and particularly what the prophets say of him, contains an absolutely true thought of God; and this teaching Jesus, who was a careful student of the Old Testament, accepted and confirmed. But, as we have seen, there are passages in the Old Testament which are below the high level of the New Testament in their view both of God and of religion. This imperfect teaching, which belongs to days when God had not yet made the full truth clear, must be corrected by reference to the teaching of the New Testament. We must read the Old Testament in the light of the Gospel. Once we have grasped this point we shall find many of our difficulties about the Old Testament will vanish.

The Study of the Bible.

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and light unto my path." So says the Psalmist (Ps. cxix. 105). But what we get out of a book depends on what we

bring to it. If the Bible is to help us in our daily life, we must come to it with the real desire to learn the spiritual truth which it has to teach us. Its teaching must soak into our minds. We must come to it in a humble, prayerful, and obedient spirit. We must make its highest teaching the standard and goal of our daily lives. Bible reading has largely gone out of fashion. But if we are to live aright we cannot do without its help. And what a fascinating book it is! How those old stories of Abraham and Moses and David and Daniel thrill us! How like ourselves were the people described in the Bible! We see them tempted and falling, and rising again by the grace of God. "These things happened unto them by way of example; and they were written for our admonition" (1 Cor. x. 11).

But it is in the New Testament that we shall find the richest food for our souls. There we have recorded those words of Jesus which never grow stale, which have brought comfort and life to countless generations. There we see the picture of Jesus, strong and tender, as He moved among men. And then we have the story of what Jesus meant to a man like St. Paul. St. Paul's Epistles are the letters of one who had found out by experience what Jesus Christ could do for him in daily life. In them he tells his inner history, the history of a converted soul, saved by the power of the Living Jesus. He wrote those letters because he wanted to tell others that they might have the same

experience of salvation and of the love of God. To refuse to study our Bibles is to starve our religious life. To study them is to find ourselves in a land bright with sunlight and rich with the treasures of God.

CHAPTER VI

SIN AND JUDGMENT

THE Bible tells the story of sin and its cure. It speaks very plainly about sin, shows how hateful it is to God, what ruin it causes in human life, what consequences it brings in its train. It looks at sin from God's point of view. In the Bible shadow and light are blended. The shadow is sin, a very dark shadow. But over against the shadow is the light. This light is the love of God, who seeks to save man from his sin, and sent Jesus Christ as Saviour to redeem mankind—that is, to free men from sin's slavery that they might live in fellowship with God. In thinking about sin we must be true to what the Bible says about it.

WHAT IS SIN?

We sin when of our own free choice we do what we know to be wrong. God has left us free to choose between good and evil, and when we choose evil we sin. We do something which we need not have done, and of which later our conscience makes us feel ashamed. There are people who say that we cannot help sinning, that what we do is the result of our education or circumstances, or

is due to the tendencies which we inherit from our parents. Now it is true that we do inherit tendencies and impulses, and it is true that a child brought up in bad surroundings is more prone to evil than one brought up in a good home. But it is not true that these things entirely account for our sinning, because each one of us has power to select his line of action. What we inherit is the raw material out of which we have to form character. To the making of character we ourselves contribute by our choices. By choosing good we help to make our character good; by choosing evil we help to make it a bad character. Thus when we sin we must put the blame upon ourselves. But we must never forget that God by His Holy Spirit seeks to aid us in forming good characters. We are not left to fight our battle alone. Many of our failures come from the fact that we neglect to ask God for His help.

Sin and Sins.

A distinction may be drawn between "sin" and "sins." *Sins* are the single wrong things we do. They include wrong thoughts and imaginations as well as outward acts. *Sin* is that whole wrong state of heart and will from which the particular wrong things we do issue. None of us are clean in God's sight. In all of us there is a poison working which infects our whole nature. This is sin. It is like a spring of muddy water constantly bubbling up.

What is meant by "original sin," which it is sometimes taught is washed away in Baptism? The baby is born into the world with tendencies and impulses which later on will prove a source of temptation. If, knowing the difference between right and wrong, he yields to these, he will commit sin. But there can be no sin in the proper sense of the word until there has been deliberate choice of evil, for sin is an act of the will. If, then, by "original sin" is meant the nature with which the child comes into the world, it is a misleading expression. But that nature, which the child inherits from sinful ancestors, does contain evil tendencies, which later on become sin, if the child yields to them instead of resisting them. The phrase "original sin" reminds us of our inheritance from the past. Men are sometimes described as having "a fallen nature." The whole subject is very difficult; but there is no doubt that we are born with what may be called a bias to evil. It is not sin proper until we have yielded to it. It is a kind of half-way house to sin.

Sin and Temptation.

Temptation is not sin. Jesus was tempted, but did not sin. He resisted instantly all temptations to evil. When temptation comes to us we turn it into sin only if we let the evil desire or thought dwell in our minds. If we drive it out at once and refuse to make it our own, we are not sinning.

We are never free from temptation. Sometimes temptation comes to us from outside; more often, perhaps, it comes from within, from our own hearts, which are greater sources of temptation than they need be because we have sinned in the past, and so have allowed the poison of sin to infect us. Temptations come to prove us. God allows us to be tempted because only by resisting temptation can we form the noble characters He wishes us to form. Metals are heated in the fire so that all dross and impurities may be burned away from them. In the same way we are disciplined by passing through the fire of temptation. Life is a long struggle between the forces of good and evil; but it is encouraging to remember that every victory over sin which we win makes the will stronger and the next victory easier.

Judgment.

A holy God cannot be indifferent to sin. Though God is ready to forgive us when we have sinned, if we are really repentant, He cannot forgive us if we are not repentant. He would be untrue to His character of perfect holiness if He lightly forgave us on easy terms. His attitude to sin must always be that of judgment. He must condemn it, for it is hateful to Him, and is the one thing which interrupts the fellowship between Himself and His human children.

Jesus Christ plainly taught that there would be

a judgment on sin hereafter.[1] He used the gravest language about judgment to come and about the fate of the unrepentant sinner.[2] Much of this language is picture language, which is not to be taken literally. Not a little of it is quotation from Jewish books which were current when He lived. In using this language He was employing a form of speech which would be intelligible to His hearers. But the picture language has a meaning, and the meaning is plain. It tells us that hereafter a distinction will be made between good and bad, and that judgment will be meted out to the unrepentant sinner. Our own hearts assure us that there is nothing unjust about this. Here in this life we punish the criminal and put him in prison. We feel that wrong-doing deserves punishment. We condemn ourselves when we do wrong. Conscience sits as a judge within us, and in conscience we recognise the voice of God. The verdicts of conscience are, we feel, an anticipation of the divine verdict hereafter.

It is all-important, however, to remember that conscience needs training and educating. It does not speak with the same voice in all. A's conscience will allow him to do something which B's conscience forbids. Why is this? It may be due to one or both of two things. A man may have neglected to train his conscience. He may have

[1] *Cf.* the Parables of Judgment, Matt. xxv, Luke xii. 41-48, xvi. 19 to end.

[2] Matt. xiii. 49, 50; xviii. 7-9; xvi. 26, 27; Luke xiii. 5.

taken no trouble to seek out what is highest, but have been content to adopt lower standards of conduct. Or he may have stifled the voice of conscience by refusing to listen to its warnings. But the result is that his conscience has grown blunted. The only standard for a Christian is the life and character of Jesus Christ. We must train our conscience to approve what He approves and to condemn what He condemns.

The Last Day.

A traditional element in popular Christian theology is the belief that there will be a great Judgment Day at the last, when all souls will be summoned before the judgment-seat of God, when the books will be opened[1] and sentence passed upon all men. It is very natural that we should so think of the end. But it is thinking in pictures, and such picture thinking is not to be taken as if it were an accurate statement of what will actually happen. We must pass behind the picture to the truth which it is trying to represent. That truth is that we shall all in some way hereafter have to give account to God for the use which we have made of our lives. What we call the Last Judgment will be the register or summary of all the many choices we have been making every day. Every day judgment is going on. By our daily choices we are making our characters, making our own heaven

[1] Rev. xx. 12.

or hell. At the last what we really are will be clearly revealed.

The fact that there will be a judgment is sure, but we are in complete ignorance as to the time of it. There is a widely held opinion that at death we pass into a waiting period or intermediate state, preparatory to the Last Judgment. It would seem more natural to believe that each soul passes to its judgment when its earthly life is ended, and that there is no break in the continuity of existence. But these things are hidden from us, and Jesus said nothing to satisfy our natural curiosity. There is a marked reserve about His teaching on the future. Two things only He made luminously clear: first, that there is a life to come, a glorious future in which God wants all His human children to share; second, that judgment awaits every son of man.

Does God Punish?

What is meant when we speak of God punishing the unrepentant sinner? It is important that we should have right thoughts of God in this matter. We must remember here three things: (*a*) First, God is unalterably Love, and loves the sinner with a love which nothing can change. God's Love cannot turn to hatred or vindictiveness. (*b*) Secondly, we can hardly think of God as personally intervening to punish the sinner, in the way in which the schoolmaster personally inter-

venes to punish his pupil. Such a way of thinking tends to make God a magnified man. (*c*) Thirdly, we have to be careful in speaking of God as angry. Anger is a human emotion, which cannot be attributed to God without considerable qualification. The "wrath" of God spoken of in the Bible is hardly anger, but is a way of expressing the intense opposition of God to sin and the complete abhorrence which He feels for it.[1]

May we not think of what we describe as God's punishment of sin in the two following ways? (1) First, it is a plain fact that sin brings with it its inevitable consequences, and these consequences are its punishment. Sometimes these consequences are physical, such as loss of health or impairment of the bodily powers. Always they are moral and spiritual. Sin persisted in weakens and degrades the character. It blinds our spiritual vision, and renders us increasingly unfit for fellowship with God. We punish ourselves by separating ourselves from God. We become like the man in the parable without the wedding garment, who was out of place in that company.[2] (2) Now suppose that in the clearer light of the hereafter the unrepentant sinner awakens to a realisation of his true state; will he not suffer the agonies of remorse? He finds himself in God's presence—that is, in a spiritual world where no

[1] Which is the higher thought of God, to think of Him as angry, or to think of His Love as deeply wounded and grieved by sin?

[2] Matt. xxii. 11 *ff.*

disguises or excuses are possible—and he realises how unfit he is for that world. By his own past actions he has made himself unfit. He sees how foolish he has been, how ungrateful, how he has been wounding the loving heart of God. He is revealed to himself, and the revelation is his judgment, and brings with it his punishment in the shape of a torturing and self-accusing conscience. The love of God, which he has despised, turns to his own condemnation. Is not that punishment enough? Is there any worse punishment than to be left alone with our own bad self, and to realise how we have persistently turned away from the tender love of God?

Meanwhile, what vitally concerns us all is to remember that God in His love is calling us to fellowship with Himself. He offers us the aid of His Spirit in our fight with sin. If we neglect that offer and persist in sinning, we are wounding His love, and are putting up barriers between ourselves and God. We are ruining the human nature which Christ took to Himself that He might purify it and redeem it.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHURCH

God made us live together in groups or societies. We were born into a family, we belong to a nation. No one can live a full human life if he tries to live alone. We need one another, we were made for one another. What is true of our ordinary life is also true of our religious life. We need a fellowship or society of people with whom we may share our worship and religious interests. Such a fellowship or society Jesus founded. There had been a Jewish Church before Christ came, but He formed a fellowship on a new basis. With Jesus Christ came into being a new society of which He was the Head. St. Paul describes the Church as the "body" of Christ, and each individual Christian as a member of that body.[1] The body receives its life from Christ its Head; all its members share in a common life derived from Him.

Membership in the Church.

There are Christian people today who do not regard membership in the Church as important. They say: "What really matters is whether I am

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 27.

being loyal to Jesus Christ or not, whether I have found salvation in Him. Whether I belong to a Church or not, or what Church I belong to, is a thing of secondary importance." Such people are in one sense right, but in another sense wrong. They are right in insisting that *personal loyalty to Jesus is of the very essence of Christian discipleship*. Without that, membership in a Church is of little use. A bad man may be a baptised member of the Church; he may even be regular in attending its services, including the service of Holy Communion; but at the Judgment Day his Church membership will not save him. There is something deeper than belonging to the Church, and that is a personal devotion to Jesus Christ, and the receiving from Him of His life and strength, so that He controls us in all we think or say or do. But our friends are wrong in attaching such little value to Church membership; and this for two reasons. First, there is no question that Christianity is a social religion which implies a fellowship of believers. Jesus meant His followers to form a fellowship. Secondly, if there were no Church, where would our private religion be? Would it not lack support and be in danger of dying? Each of us owes an enormous debt to our Church, to its services, its teaching, to the mere fact that it is there, holding up Christ's banner and witnessing to His truth.

The Teaching of the New Testament.

In this matter, as in all matters of the Christian life, the New Testament must be our guide, for through it we learn what was the mind of Christ and His Apostles. Now we cannot read our New Testaments without seeing that Jesus, as has been already said, did found a fellowship, out of which the Church grew; and that the Apostles, after His death, set one object before themselves, to spread the Christian Church abroad through the world. In the *Acts of the Apostles* we have the story of the early spread of Christianity. We see the Church growing, taking shape, trying to solve the many problems which it met. In that story there is one chapter of special importance. It is the chapter which tells how the Spirit came upon the Church on that first Whitsunday.[1] Read that chapter, and see how these early disciples felt themselves to be one. They were filled with a sense of fellowship, of common life. And they took as a picture of that fellowship the one loaf, of which they all ate, when they met to join in the Holy Communion. It was because there was this fellowship that the Church grew. They all worked in a common cause. One Master was leading them; one Spirit was inspiring them; and they saw a vision of one Christian society, one great brotherhood, all of whose members were living in union with Jesus Christ.

[1] Acts ii.

We see, then, that we cannot do without the Church, and that there must be a Church, because Christianity is a religion of love, and love draws men together. When Jesus Christ gives His Spirit, the Spirit of love, to a group of people, they cannot help coming together. He makes them into a society or fellowship.

What is the Catholic Church?

But now our difficulties begin. Someone says: "I see that Jesus founded a Church, and there must be a Church; but what is the Church? There are so many Churches in the world. There are all the Free Churches, Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Wesleyans, and many others. There is the Church of England; there are the Eastern Churches. There is the Roman Catholic Church, which claims that it alone is the true Church. What do you mean when you talk of 'the Church'? Or what does the Apostles' Creed mean when it speaks of 'the holy Catholic Church'"? Let us try to answer these questions by examining more closely the meaning of the phrase "the holy Catholic Church."

Three words are used to describe the Church. (1) It is "*the*" Church—that is, the one Church. There are not many Churches, but one Church. (2) It is "*holy*"—that is, its distinguishing mark is that its members show holiness in their lives. It is a society of people, who care for character,

who fight against sin. (3) It is "*catholic*," which means "universal" or "world-wide," a Church which does not recognise those narrower distinctions of race or nationality which are recognised in social or political life.

Now, if this is what the Catholic Church is, it is clear that in one sense no such thing actually exists on earth. There is no Church all of whose members are holy; there is no Church which is world-wide in extent. And in actual fact there are many organised societies of Christians called Churches. The Church of Christ is not one single, visible organisation to which you can point and say, "There is *the* Church."

Yet "the holy Catholic Church" is not a phrase without meaning. If you describe it as consisting of "the whole company of faithful people"—that is, of all those who sincerely believe in Christ and are trying to be loyal, however they may be organised—then that whole society of believers is plainly marked off from the non-Christian world. It is a distinctive body just because it owns allegiance to Christ, which Hindus, Mohammedans and others do not. There is a sense, therefore, in which "the holy Catholic Church" does point to something which exists, even though you cannot sharply define its outer boundaries. It points also to what we call an ideal—that is, to something which ought to be something after which we should aim. Christians all ought to be holy. They ought not to be

divided up into rival and opposed sections. As there is only " one Lord, one faith, one baptism," so there ought to be only one brotherhood of Christ's disciples, living together in unity and love. Our Lord prayed that His followers might be one.[1]

It is important to remember here that the Church is a growing Church. Its goal is nothing less than the bringing of all humanity under the influence of Jesus Christ. Every nation has some special contribution to make to the Church of the future. It will be a truly catholic or universal Church when it includes all nations with their special gifts. Just as we have not yet learned to apply fully the teaching of Jesus to our social and economic and international life, so we have as yet only a dim vision of what the Catholic Church will be in generations to come. It will be a society richer and more comprehensive than any existing Christian society.

What Does " Being One " Mean ?

But what exactly does " being one " mean ? It is because we do not all agree about this that we find the word " catholic " used in different senses. Now a group of Christians may be one because they *all believe* the same things, and use the same creed. Or they may be one because in their worship they have the *same sacraments* and the same outward forms of religion. Or, again, they may have the *same form of Church government.*

[1] John xvii. 21.

For example, they may agree that a government by bishops is the best form of government; or they may think that some other form of government is better.

Now suppose that fifty Christians coming from a Church governed by bishops met fifty others coming from a Church governed, as is the Presbyterian Church, by "elders," in order to pray for the spread of Christianity in China; suppose they came, forgetting their differences over Church organisation, with the one desire that the Kingdom of Christ might spread; would they be one? Surely they would be; and they would be one in the very deepest sense of all—one in spirit, in purpose, in devotion to a common Lord and Master. Jesus said: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."[1] Would not Jesus be present at this meeting? Would they not all be one in Him?

We learn, then, that though Christians may not agree about certain Church matters, they can still be one in a very real sense. And must we not go on to say that this inward agreement of heart is a much more important thing than any outward agreement in the matter of organisation or government of the Church? The inward in the teaching of Jesus always comes before the outward. Jesus did not concern Himself much with the outward forms of religion. He was chiefly interested in the heart, in men's motives and intentions.

[1] Matt. xviii. 20.

The History of the Church.

At this point, something must very briefly be said about the history of the Church. For many centuries the Church was one, outwardly as well as inwardly. As Christianity spread, local churches grew up in various parts of the world, but they were parts of the same Church, and knew themselves to be such. They believed the same things, had the same sacraments, and accepted the principle of government by bishops. From time to time general councils were held, which the bishops and others attended, and there important decisions were made, which affected the life of the whole Church.

Then in A.D. 1054 the first great split occurred in the Church. A division arose, largely through misunderstanding, on a technical point of doctrine, and to this day the quarrel has never been healed. The Eastern Churches were unable to accept the statement which found its way at a later date into the Nicene Creed that the Holy Ghost "proceedeth from the Father and the Son," holding that He proceeds from the Father alone. But they kept their old form of government by bishops; they kept the same sacraments; and (with this one slight alteration in doctrine) the common creed of the whole Church.

At the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, further splits occurred. The Church of the West was what we today should call Roman

Catholic. Both in England and Europe the Pope was regarded as the Supreme Head of the Church on earth; and what Rome taught and practised was in matters of religion generally accepted. But there was a growing discontent with Rome.[1] This came to a head in the Reformation, and many bodies of Christians broke away from Rome. Our Church of England did, and so did many Christians on the Continent. Then further splits occurred, when groups of Englishmen left the Church of England and formed their own Churches. A study of the history of the times shows that they had good reasons for so doing. Only those who take a very narrow view of the meaning of "the Catholic Church" will condemn them for their action.

Some of the groups which broke away from Rome kept the old form of Church government. The English Church did. It retained rule by bishops; it kept also the old Creeds, and the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion which Jesus left to the Church. But many groups organised themselves in new ways. They had no bishops, and they have none today. What we see, then, as we look out on the Christian world at the present time, is Christian people organised in different groups of Churches, which do not all agree, either as to the method of governing a Church, or as to the ways of worship. The great majority of these Churches agree in their funda-

[1] See Chap. VIII., "The Church of England."

mental beliefs, and agree that a Church should have the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. But they do not agree about the best method of ecclesiastical government.

Are Bishops Necessary?

Let us now come back to the phrase "the holy Catholic Church." What does "catholic" mean? We have already seen that it means "universal" or "world-wide." Does it have any narrower meaning? Does it mean "a Church governed by bishops"? If it does, then it follows that those Churches which have no bishops are not part of "the holy Catholic Church." Dare we, however, say that they are not, seeing how God has blessed these Churches, seeing what splendid work for Christ they have done and are doing? Are they not parts of the universal Church? Are they not true branches of the vine? When Jesus gave to the Apostles and disciples His commission to carry on His work after He had gone, *He said nothing whatever about the way in which His Church was to be governed.*[1] He did, however, say, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John xiii. 35). Those who maintain that bishops are necessary if a Church is to be a true branch of the one Catholic Church, find nothing in the New Testament to support their view. They are reading back into the New Testa-

[1] John xx. 19-23.

ment what is not there. It is true that bishops were very early appointed, and that for many centuries government by bishops was the only form of Church government known. It is true also that those Churches which have had experience of such government know its value, and would not wish to abolish it. But it is entirely untrue that a Church cannot be a real Church, and a real part of the Catholic Church, without bishops. Our own Church of England, though it is governed by bishops, has never officially stated that bishops are necessary to the existence of a Church. In the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, which state the position of our Anglican Church, we find this definition of the Church:

"The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance."[1]

The emphasis here is upon the teaching of Scripture truth, and upon carrying out Christ's command about the sacraments. Nothing is said about the external organisation of the Church. Evidently the Church of England does not deny that Free Churches are parts of the Catholic Church. Indeed, can we refuse the title "true branch of the Catholic Church" to any body of Christians who accept the general creeds of the Church, and carry out Christ's commands about Baptism and Holy Communion?

[1] Article XIX.

The Harm Done by our Divisions.

We have, however, to remember that much harm has been done to the cause of Christ by these divisions among Christians, because with division has come bitterness, strife, rivalry. Foes of Christianity have been able to point with scorn to the way in which Christ's law of love has been broken. We can only hope and pray that we may draw nearer together in years to come.

No one can predict what the outward organisation of the Church will be in the future. It may be that government by bishops will be more widely accepted than it is, and that Churches which have no bishops will wish to have them. Many historical causes led to the formation of these various bodies at the time of the Reformation. It may be that, under the entirely different circumstances of today, the forces which make for reunion will prove stronger than those which make for separation. Or possibly some arrangements will be made by which Churches differently organised will be able to work together in closer relationship than they do now.

Some Principles of the Teaching of Jesus.

Meanwhile, do not let us narrow the meaning of that glorious word " catholic " or " universal." Is not the Catholic Church present wherever Jesus is present ? Is He not present wherever two or

three are met in His name? We shall be helped to preserve a right judgment about all these questions connected with the meaning of the phrase "the Catholic Church," if we bear in mind these truths, which shine out from the pages of the New Testament:

1. The inward is of more importance than the outward.

2. Jesus said nothing about the outward organisation of the Church, though He left His Church two sacraments.

3. Jesus wanted His followers to be one, and intended that there should be a visible Church, a society to which men could point and say: "There is the Church." But there is no evidence that He meant that society to be organised in all its different branches in the same way.

4. Jesus is universal enough to be the Saviour of all men. He can use any kind of outward organisation as a channel through which His life can flow. We must not limit the action of the Spirit of God.

5. Jesus gave to men the commandment that they should love one another.[1] Church divisions which lead to a breach of the law of love are unChristian.

[1] John xv. 17.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

The Church of England is a branch of the Catholic or Universal Church. It is the National Church, even though many English people are outside it and belong to other branches of the Catholic Church.

A National Church.

We call it the National Church for the following reasons:

(*a*) First, every inch of English soil (we are not speaking of Wales, or Scotland, or Ireland)[1] is in some parish, which is a parish of the Church of England. In every parish there is a parish church, where a clergyman of the Church of England takes the services. Our Book of Common Prayer is used in all these churches.

[1] The Church of Wales and the Church of Ireland are independent branches of the Catholic Church. They are "disestablished"—that is, have no longer that special connection with the State which the Church of England has. In Scotland the "established" or national Church is Presbyterian; but there exists an Episcopal Church, organised under bishops, like the Church of England This, however, is a voluntary association, like one of the Free Churches in England. It has no special connection with the State.

(*b*) Secondly, the laws of the land recognise the Church of England as being the National Church. Our kings are crowned in Westminster Abbey, and the service used on that occasion is a Church of England service. Our bishops sit in the House of Lords, and so are Members of Parliament. In a variety of ways the State and the Church are closely connected, and have been connected all through our history. This connection has been of great value to both. Because of this connection the Church of England is called the " Established " Church—that is, the Church recognised by Parliament as representing the nation on its religious side.

This, however, does not mean that the State created the Church. In England the Church existed long before there was a proper State or Government. Its clergy are not paid by the State, as is sometimes falsely said. They are paid out of funds which belong to the Church. Parliament however, exercises considerable control over the Church, though in the last few years the Church has rightly been given more freedom to manage its own affairs without Parliamentary interference.

The Church Assembly is now the central official body through which the Church conducts its business, and is recognised as such by Parliament. It has power to draw up Bills to be presented to Parliament. These Bills are examined by a special committee appointed by Parliament. If this committee approves of a Bill, the Bill goes to Parliament, and is as a rule passed without

comment. But Parliament has the right to reject a Church Bill. Parliament is so busy with other matters that it has little time to deal with Church legislation. In former years, before the Church Assembly existed, reforms, which were urgently needed in the Church, were frequently delayed for years, because Parliament had no time to consider them. But, subject to its right of veto, Parliament has now given the Church liberty to manage its own affairs.[1]

The Origin of the Church of England.

There was an ancient British Church in this land as early as A.D. 300. It existed probably earlier, though we do not know how or when Christianity first reached these islands. When, about A.D. 401, the Romans left Britain because their soldiers were needed to defend Rome, the British Church suffered severely at the hands of heathen invaders. Christianity was practically stamped out except in Wales and Cornwall. In A.D. 597 Pope Gregory sent St. Augustine from Rome on a mission to

[1] The Church Assembly consists of three Houses: the House of Bishops, the House of Clergy, and the House of Laity. The House of Clergy consists of the members of the Lower Houses of the Convocations of Canterbury and York. The members of the House of Laity are elected by the lay members of the Diocesan Conferences, who, in their turn, have been elected, either by the Parochial Church Councils, or by the lay representatives in the Ruri-decanal Conferences. The principle of laymen electing laymen for the House of Laity is carefully preserved. Women can be elected as well as men.

convert England, and in a short period of seven years he laid the foundations of the English Church in the south of England. The Church quickly grew. For some time there was friction on various points between the ancient British Church and the bishops who succeeded St. Augustine. The British Church had its own usages which did not always agree with those of Rome. But the quarrel was ended by the victory of the Roman party. Gradually the Church became organised and united. It was in grave danger at the end of the eighth century from the Danes who invaded England. But the Danes were defeated by King Alfred, and many of them settled in England and became Christians. England was now a Christian country. Its Church was modelled on that of Rome.

If we now pass on to A.D. 1500 we shall still not find the Church of England as we know it today. England then recognised the Pope as the supreme spiritual head of the Church. But for centuries before that date Englishmen had been restless under the rule of the Pope. If Rome had been content to exercise only a spiritual authority, there would not have been so much discontent; but Rome claimed the right to interfere in other matters, and the English, who have always loved freedom, resented this. One cause of the Reformation was the growth in England of a feeling of nationality, a sense that a nation ought to be free to manage its own affairs. At the time when the Reformation began Henry VIII. was king. He

was a strong, vigorous king, who was not prepared to see his own authority undermined by that of a foreign ruler.

But there was another large reason for the Reformation. Roman Catholicism had become corrupt and superstitious. It had departed from the faith and practice of the Church in primitive times and was teaching things for which there was no warrant in Scripture. Our scholars had for some time past been studying the New Testament for themselves. They wanted to discover what it taught; they were not content to accept without examination what Rome taught. Their study of the original documents of Christianity showed them how much error there was in the teaching of Rome. Also up to this time the Church services were in Latin, which most people could not understand; and there was no general distribution of Bibles. It was resolved, therefore, to translate the Bible into the common speech, and to provide services in English for public worship. The crisis came when, under the leadership of Henry VIII., the authority of the Pope was set aside, and the English Church broke away from the Roman Church. The Reformation, however, was not accomplished in a day, nor in one reign. Only gradually did the Church of England take its special shape; but it began to exist as a separate branch of the Catholic Church when Henry VIII. threw over the authority of the Pope.

Not a New Church.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that at the Reformation a new Church was set up in England. The Reformers would have been horrified if you had told them they were making a new Church. They were only reforming the ancient Church, trying to restore it to the state of purity it enjoyed in the early centuries of its life. It remained the same Church still. It was a reformed branch of the Catholic Church. It accepted the common creeds of the Church, had the same sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, and preserved government by bishops. A patient who recovers from a bad illness remains the same man. The Church was ill; it had to be restored to health; but when it recovered it was still the same Church, the Catholic Church of Christ in England.

Some Features of the Reformed Church of England.

Every branch of the Catholic Church has its own special features. Let us see what are some of the features of our Church, and what impress the Reformation gave it. In other words, let us see what were some of the main principles which guided the Reformers in their work. No Churchman ought to be ignorant about these matters.

1. *The Reformers made Scripture the test of what was to be believed and taught.* Article VI. of the Thirty-Nine Articles[1] says: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be recognised of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation." Article XX. says: "It is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything that is contrary to God's Word written." As a teaching body the Church of England takes its stand on Scripture. We must have some test which we can apply to what is taught and practised in the Church. What other test can be found except the New Testament, which shows us the mind of Christ and His Apostles? History shows that false beliefs and superstitions constantly arise in the Church. We have to guard against them. We must make the teaching of the New Testament our standard. Tradition has, of course, its place. As the Church grew it had to meet new situations, which were not

[1] The Thirty-Nine Articles were drawn up in 1562. They and the Book of Common Prayer are the written documents which set out the position of the Church of England as a Reformed Church. It is not surprising that after the lapse of more than three centuries some things in the Articles are out of date. What are not out of date are the fundamental principles of the Reformers, some of which are enumerated above. These principles have made the very character of our National Church. The theological and ecclesiastical position taken by the Reformers has not been proved untenable by the discovery of any new historical facts.

contemplated by the Apostles. There has been a natural development of doctrine, organisation, forms of worship. But the New Testament must still remain our guide. We must be always asking the question, Is this teaching, or this practice true to the New Testament?

2. *The Reformers insisted that everyone had the right to come freely to God without the need of any priest to act as a go-between or intermediary.* This does not mean that there is not room for a properly appointed ministry. The Church must have its ministers to lead the worship of the people, to teach them, and to administer the Sacraments. But it does mean that a man's salvation does not depend on something being done *for him* by a priest; and that no minister has a right to *dictate* to his people in spiritual matters or to insist that they must put themselves under his direction. At the Reformation the Church of England revolted against the tyranny of the priesthood, and affirmed what is called "the priesthood of the laity." Christ's invitation, "Come unto Me," is a free invitation. Souls come to God in many different ways. We cannot lay down any one way of approach as being the only way.

3. *The right of the Church of England, or of any branch of the Catholic Church, to manage its own affairs* was another principle emphasised at the Reformation, There were, of course, limits to this freedom. If a Church was to remain part of the Catholic Church it must accept the common

beliefs of the whole Church and obey Christ's commands about the sacraments. But it "hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith" (Article XX.). This liberty the Church of England exercised by drawing up its own Prayer Book, and by rejecting doctrines of the Roman Church which it considered false and ceremonies which it considered superstitious. Nor was it prepared to accept all the decisions of the general councils of the Church which had been made in earlier days. It said that such councils "may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining to God" (Article XXI.). The Church of England is a self-governing branch of the Universal Church.

4. *The Reformers purified and simplified the teaching of the Church about the sacraments, and especially the teaching about Holy Communion.* Most of the abuses and superstitions had grown up in connection with the Holy Communion. It was the object of the Reformers to get rid of these, and to teach a doctrine of the sacraments which should be more in harmony with the New Testament and primitive practice. It is unnecessary here to go into detail on this matter, for later chapters of this book deal with the sacraments. But it is important to remember that the chief object of the Reformers' attack was the Roman system of the Mass and the Confessional, with all that it involved.

Is the Church of England Worth Preserving?

The Church of England has never been a narrow Church. Men of very different religious views have found shelter within its walls. High, Low, and Broad Churchmen have always been at home in our National Church. This is one of the reasons why the Church of England has rooted itself so deeply in the affections of the English people, who love freedom and are by nature tolerant. No wise person will want to change this comprehensive character of the Church. But there are tendencies at work today which would undo the work of the Reformation, and restore some of the very things against which the Reformers fought. If these tendencies prevail, the historical character of the Church of England will be profoundly altered, and altered in a direction which is not suitable to the English people. Changes are inevitable. The Reformation is not the last word in English religion. But the more we study what the Reformers did, the more do we see how wise they were. We must preserve their foundations, even if we add new wings or new stories to the ancient building. The Church of England is surely worth preserving. God has still a great work for it to do, both at home and in the Empire and in the wide lands of heathendom.

CHAPTER IX

THE MINISTRY

In the Church of England we have a threefold ministry of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. In the Preface to the Ordinal,[1] which is printed towards the end of the Prayer Book, it is stated that "from the Apostles' time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ's Church," and that the Church of England has no intention of changing this ancient arrangement. We have already seen that the Reformers were anxious to retain as much of the old organisation, beliefs, and practices of the Church as was possible.

Its Gradual Growth.

The question we have first to ask is when and how this threefold ministry came into existence. It is clear that it was not instituted by Jesus Christ. He gave His Apostles a commission to preach and teach and baptise, and, as has been already stated,

[1] The Ordinal is called "The Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, according to the Order of the Church of England." It was drawn up with its Preface in 1550, but underwent various changes in subsequent years. As we have it now it dates from 1661.

intended that a Christian Fellowship or Society should be formed to carry on His work. But He said nothing whatever about the form of organisation which His Church should adopt. He did not say that there were to be bishops or priests or deacons. He left the Church free to adopt, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, any form of organisation which it thought best. At first this threefold ministry did not exist. It came gradually into being. As we study the *Acts of the Apostles* and the Epistles we find the following state of affairs:

1. First, the Church grows almost in a haphazard manner, though, of course, God was guiding its growth. Little congregations of believers spring up in different places. Sometimes the church in a locality is represented by a single household. Thus St. Paul can write: "Aquila and Prisca salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house" (1 Cor. xvi. 19). Christians travelling from one place to another, or forced to flee from their homes by persecution, would bring the good news to others, and so fresh groups of believers would be formed.

2. Secondly, there was no regular or settled ministry. The Apostles, as was natural from their position and from the fact that they had received their commission from Jesus, took the first place in the life of the Church, and were regarded as having a special authority. Thus St. James was head of the Church at Jerusalem.

St. Paul speaks of him as one of those who were "accounted pillars" (Gal. ii. 9). He presided at the important conference described in Acts xv. But there is no evidence that the Apostles appointed at the first a special order of men to be ministers in the different congregations. On the contrary, the evidence we have in the New Testament shows that men with special spiritual gifts naturally took the lead in ministering in their respective congregations. In 1 Cor. xiv. St. Paul gives us an account of a primitive service. No special minister is mentioned as taking charge. Any member of the congregation may speak or pray as the Spirit moves him. It was a time of experiment; the Church was feeling its way towards a settled organisation. If a group of settlers today went out to colonise a tract of country in South America, and had no clergyman among them, would it not be natural that some one of their number should lead the religious life of the community?

3. Thirdly, in this very early period we read of ministers of various kinds, who do not appear later, when the organisation of the Church had become more settled, such as "prophets," "evangelists," "pastors and teachers."[1] It is hard to say what exactly were the duties of these men, but St. Paul's mention of them shows that we must not expect to find at first the regular threefold ministry which grew up later.

One point is worth mentioning in passing.

[1] *Cf.* 1 Cor. xii. 28 to end, and Eph. iv. 11, 12.

The Early Church was expecting a speedy return of our Lord to earth.[1] The Second Coming was thought to be near at hand. This being so, why should the Church trouble about a regular system of ministry, when in a few years it would not be needed ?

Deacons Appointed.

We read in Acts vi. how quite early it was found necessary by the Church at Jerusalem to appoint certain officers to deal with the administration of the funds collected for the relief of the poor. The Apostles had higher work to do. They were entrusted with the general superintendence of the whole Church, and in particular with the ministry of the word. Their work as teachers and preachers was being hindered. Does not many a modern parish priest find that too much of his time is being taken up with business details, which a layman might well see after ? The Christians of Jerusalem were therefore called together and bidden select " seven men of good report, full of the Spirit, whom we may appoint over this business." These seven were brought to the Apostles, and set apart for their work with prayer and the laying on of hands. This was the beginning of the order of deacons. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that the seven were identical with the deacons of later date. The word " deacon " does not occur in Acts. There is no evidence that the

[1] *Cf.* 1 Thess. iv. 13 *ff.*

Apostles were creating a permanent order. The permanent order of deacons arose later. We hear no more of the seven. The word " deacon " is an English noun derived from a Greek verb which means to " serve " or " minister." The Greek word is used for any kind of service in the Church, spiritual or material. We see, then, how this order of deacons arose originally through the pressure of practical needs. The primary duty of a deacon was to be a relieving officer; but, if the deacon had other gifts, he might also act, as Stephen and Philip did, as a minister of the word. What the Church at Jerusalem did was copied by other local Churches, and so gradually the order of deacons became part of the regular constitution of the Church.

Priests and Bishops.

The word " priest " is only another form of the word " presbyter " or " elder." In the New Testament we frequently read of the presence of " elders" in the various local Churches. These were probably senior members of the congregation, or men of some special qualifications, who were selected to preside over the affairs of the local Church. Such an arrangement was both natural and necessary. These men formed a second order of ministers, whose duties were various. They had the care of the poor and sick, and, if there were any deacons in the congregation, they would have the oversight of them. They superintended the

public worship of the congregation, presided as judges in disputes between Christians, and exercised a general supervision over the local Church. They were probably set apart for their work with prayer and the laying on of hands. An Apostle, or possibly a prophet, would be the natural person to "ordain" them, as we should today say. But if no Apostle were available, as must at times have happened, then members of the congregation would set them apart. There was an organised Church at Rome, but there is no evidence that its elders were ordained by any Apostle. Probably the first Apostle to visit Rome was St. Paul; but the Church was there long before he went to the place.

The elders, then, formed a council or committee of management and superintendence, and one of their number would be elected chairman or president of the council. His opinion would naturally carry most weight, and he would most probably preside at the service of Holy Communion, though there is nothing to show that any elder might not preside.

What of the third order, that of bishops? It does not exist as a third order till some years have passed. Scholars are agreed that the word "bishop" is the same as the word "elder" or "presbyter." The order of bishops arose gradually out of the order of elders. The chairman or president of the committee of elders is the bishop of the future. That office became the office of the bishop as the Church grew and it was found necessary to have someone to superintend the

group of elders in a district. By the middle of the second century the order of bishops is well established. It came into being gradually to meet the new needs of a growing Church. It has proved itself to be a very valuable form of government.

The Apostolical Succession.

It is sometimes said that our Lord commissioned the Apostles to ordain bishops to carry on their work, and hence that Churches which have no bishops do not belong to the true Church. This is not so. It must be repeated that such a view has no warrant in Scripture. The order of bishops arose in the way which has been described. That there has been a continuous succession of ministers since the days of the Apostles is clear; and since the establishment of the order of bishops, the power to make new ministers, including bishops, has, in those Churches which have bishops, been left in the hands of the bishops. This arrangement has made for regularity and order in the Church. It has also been a security against false teaching arising, for bishops in ordaining new ministers have been careful to see that they believe what the Church teaches.[1] This Apostolical Succession, as it is called, is a valuable thing. It helps to preserve the historical continuity of the Church and its ministry. But it is a false view of the Apos-

[1] *Cf.* Article XXIII. of the Thirty-nine Articles, which lays down the conditions of an orderly ministry.

tolical Succession to say, either that our Lord told the Apostles to appoint bishops as their successors, or that Christian ministers cannot be appointed in other ways than by the laying on of a bishop's hands.

The Christian Minister.

The first question put to a deacon at his ordination is, "Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office and ministration?" The inward call comes first. The prophets of the Old Testament dared to do their work only because they felt God was calling them.[1] If a man feels that he is called by God to be His minister, he may rest assured that divine help will be given him. Besides the inward call there is the outward call. The man is called to minister in a particular branch of the Church, and is duly set apart for his office according to the regular order of the Church to which he belongs In the Church of England he is ordained by a bishop. He is ordained first as a deacon, and later on as a priest. His ordination gives him certain powers and a definite authority. What these are we have now to consider.

He is empowered to conduct public worship, to administer the sacraments, to preach and teach. It is his duty to visit the sick, and generally to act as the friend and pastor of his people. He becomes the recognised leader of the congregation, and may

[1] *Cf.* Amos vii. 15; Ezek. ii. 3.

be said to be the representative of the people to God, acting on their behalf.

We often speak of the "parish priest." But no Christian minister is ever called in the New Testament a "priest," except in passages where his lay brethren are also called priests.[1] In other words, the New Testament does not regard the minister as a mediator or go-between between man and God, who alone can procure certain benefits for the people. The only mediator is Jesus Christ. We come to God through Christ. What He did and does for us makes it possible for us to live in fellowship with God. In the Old Testament the Jewish priest offered sacrifices on behalf of the people. In the Christian religion there are no sacrifices, save the one Sacrifice of Himself offered by Jesus, and the spiritual sacrifice of obedience which we all have to offer. The individual Christian has the right of direct access to God. He needs no priest to open for him the door of Heaven. Christianity knows nothing of a sacrificing priesthood.[2]

[1] *Cf.* 1 Pet. ii. 9; Rev. i. 6.

[2] Bishop Lightfoot, in his famous *Dissertation on the Christian Ministry*, writes: "Above all, the kingdom of Christ has no sacerdotal system. It interposes no sacrificial tribe or class between God and man, by whose intervention alone God is reconciled and man forgiven. Each individual member holds personal communion with the Divine Head. To Him immediately he is responsible, and from Him directly he obtains pardon and draws strength" ("Epistle to the Philippians," p. 181).

The word "sacerdotal" comes from the Latin word *sacerdos*, which means a sacrificing priest.

There have been times in the history of the Church when the priest was held to be a sacrificing priest, and to belong to a class possessing a peculiar spiritual authority. There are branches of the Catholic Church where such a view still obtains. But it is not the view of the Church of England, and finds no support in the New Testament. The Reformers rejected such a view. We should think of the minister as a leader and helper in spiritual things, called by God to his work, and set apart for it by the bishop, who, acting in the name of the whole Church, gives him his formal commission.

CHAPTER X

HOLY BAPTISM

BAPTISM was practised by the Jews before the time of Christ. They used to baptise Gentiles, who wished to adopt the Jewish religion. St. John the Baptist, as his name shows, administered Baptism to those of his hearers who showed readiness to repent. Water is a purifying agent, and it was very natural that a rite like Baptism should grow up as a symbol of the inward cleansing of the heart and will. Jesus Himself was baptised by the Baptist at the opening of His public ministry; but in His case the washing with water did not signify cleansing from sin, because He was sinless. His Baptism was the mark of His formal consecration of Himself to His ministry and of His complete self-identification with those He came to save. It received the divine approval when the Spirit descended on Him.[1]

Baptism was one of the two sacraments which our Lord left to His Church. It was the sacrament of formal admission into the Christian fellowship. We read in Matt. xxviii. 19 that before His Ascension Jesus said to His disciples: "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the

[1] *Cf.* Matt. iii. 17.

nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." There is, however, some evidence that at first a simpler form of words was used, and that Baptism was in the name of Jesus alone.[1] But the use of the threefold Name quickly became the rule of the Church.

The Outward Part of the Sacrament.

A sacrament, as the Catechism reminds us, has two parts, an outward and an inward. There is "the outward visible sign, and the inward spiritual grace," to which the sign points. In Baptism the outward part consists of water and the words, "in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The signing with the cross which follows completes the rite of Baptism by admitting the baptised person into the fellowship of the Church. In case of urgent illness a separation may be made between the two portions of the service. But the two naturally go together, for one part of the meaning of Baptism is that it admits to the fellowship of the Christian society. When, in cases of urgent sickness, private Baptism has been administered, it is expected that, if the person recovers, he shall be brought later to be received into the Church.[2] The water may either be poured upon the head of the person to be

[1] *Cf.* Acts ii. 38, viii. 16, x. 48, xix. 5.
[2] *Cf.* the Office of Private Baptism in the Prayer Book.

baptised, or the person may be dipped in the water. The latter practice is not suitable in our climate, but is adopted in some hot countries. The symbolism of this method is beautiful. The waters which pass over the head of the person are the grave in which his sin is buried, and from them he rises to a new life of righteousness.[1]

Infant Baptism.

In the earliest days of the Church the great majority of those baptised were grown-up people. But when whole families became Christian there is reason to believe that infant Baptism was practised. There is no undisputed case of infant Baptism in the New Testament, but we read of households being baptised, which probably included children.[2] In any case, no reasonable objection can be made to the custom of infant Baptism. Is not the Church right in welcoming the new life to its fellowship at the earliest possible moment? Did not Jesus say, "Suffer the little children to come unto me"? In cases of extremity anyone, man or woman, may baptise. Should a baby die suddenly unbaptised we need not be anxious about its future.[3] Baptism is not to be regarded as a kind of passport into the next world.

But it is in connection with infant Baptism that people are puzzled. The Catechism describes a

[1] Rom. vi. 4. [2] Acts xvi. 15, 33; 1 Cor. i. 16.
[3] *Cf.* what is said about original sin, Ch. VI., p. 57.

sacrament not only as an outward sign of an inward gift, but as "a means whereby we receive" the inward gift. It is what is called "an effectual sign," a sign that effects something, not merely points to something. Now here lies the difficulty. People say: "We can understand the case of a grown-up person. If he is sincere and comes to his Baptism in faith and repentance, we can believe that God gives him His Holy Spirit, and that there is an inward change in his heart. But is there any inward change in the baby, who has no knowledge of what is being done to him? What is the meaning of Baptism in this case?"

The Inward Part of the Sacrament.

A. *The Planting of a Seed.*

It is sometimes said that at Baptism a seed is planted in the heart of the baby, which later on ripens into the fruit of a holy life. But just as seeds may lie hidden for years in the ground without growing, so this baptismal seed may not ripen for years, and in some cases may never ripen at all. The seed, it is said, is there all the while in the bad man, but its growth is stopped because his life is bad. But can we believe this? Can we take this picture language about a seed literally? God's Holy Spirit when He meets with our spirits does not sow seeds, but influences our minds and wills by suggesting high thoughts, and giving us power to live better lives. The

whole idea of a seed is wrong. Goodness cannot be planted in us by some external power; we have to grow into goodness by responding to the suggestions of God. And the infant at Baptism is not old enough to make that response. We cannot, of course, say how early in life God's Spirit may begin to influence the child. We are sure that His love plays round him from the first; but no seed of goodness is sown, because the goodness of character can only come about through the conscious response and co-operation of the person himself with the Holy Spirit.

B. *Regeneration.*

Regeneration means New Birth, and in the Catechism the inward grace at Baptism is described as "a death unto sin, and a new birth unto righteousness." In the Service of Public Baptism of Infants in the Prayer Book a prayer is offered that the child may "receive remission of his sins by spiritual regeneration," and after he has been baptised he is described as being "regenerate." We shall not be able to form a clear idea of the meaning of Baptism until we are clear as to what regeneration means. The word occurs in the New Testament. Let us see what it means there, for the New Testament must be our guide. In St. Paul's Epistle to Titus (iii. 4-7) is the following passage:

"But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and his love toward man, appeared, not by works

done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

The "washing of regeneration" plainly refers to Baptism, but it is closely connected with the "renewing of the Holy Ghost." The same word "renewing" is used by St. Paul in Rom. xii. 2: "Be not fashioned according to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." What did the Apostle mean? Is it not clear that he meant a real change of heart and will, so that the man who before was not troubling how he lived now began to live the life of obedience to God? He became a changed man; he was "transformed"; he was born anew. By "regeneration" and "renewal" St. Paul means the same thing—a real change of character under the influence of the Holy Spirit. And this is what our Lord meant, when He said to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John iii. 5). Now a baby of a month old cannot be regenerate in the sense of having a changed character. At that early age he has no character; for character is what we form for ourselves by our choices. No miracle is worked on the baby by Baptism; and, as we have seen, we cannot believe that any

"seed" of goodness is sown in him. Why, then, is the child called "regenerate"? Is not the answer this: that he is called "regenerate" in anticipation of what it is hoped he may become?[1] In a very real sense the child makes a new start at Baptism. He is received into the Church. Prayers are offered for him. His godparents make solemn promises on his behalf. All the help that the Church can give him is open to him. As he grows up, if those responsible for him do their duty, he will gradually find himself being helped in spiritual ways. And all the while God's Holy Spirit is moulding him in proportion to his power to make response to that moulding.[2]

C. *The Seal of Baptism.*

Article XXVII. of the Thirty-Nine Articles describes Baptism as "a sign of Regeneration or new Birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church; the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the Sons of God by the Holy Ghost are visibly signed and sealed; Faith is confirmed, and Grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God."

Why is a seal put upon a document? It adds confirmation to what is in the document. If two

[1] Baptism, we must remember, looks forward to Confirmation; *cf.* Ch. XI.

[2] Nothing is said in this chapter about original sin. This is discussed in Ch. VI.

men sign a contract about buying a house, and set their seals to it, it means that the one man solemnly pledges himself to sell the house, and the other to buy it, both fulfilling faithfully all the conditions laid down in the contract. Baptism is like a seal. It bears solemn witness to the fact that God is ready to forgive sins, that He gives the Holy Spirit to those who ask, that He welcomes us as His children. It bears solemn witness also to the fact that a new start is being made in the baptised person's life, that he is joining himself to Christ and becoming a "member of Christ."

In the case of a grown-up person who takes the matter seriously, Baptism means that a real spiritual change occurs. In the case of an infant, it means that the spiritual change will occur as the child grows up, if care is taken to train him aright.

Summary.

Baptism, then, may be thought of under the following heads:

(*a*) It is the welcoming of the baptised person into the fellowship of the Church.

(*b*) It is the claiming for him publicly of all the privileges which membership in the Church implies.

(*c*) It is the public proclamation that he is God's child, unlike anyone else, with his own special Christian name, and his own unique relation to God.

(*d*) It is the new start, which looks forward to a long life of growing goodness and service of God.

(*e*) It is the seal, which all can see, attesting solemnly that God is faithful, and will forgive the sins of those who truly repent, and give the Holy Spirit to those who come in humble faith.

CHAPTER XI

CONFIRMATION

At the end of the service of Holy Baptism the minister says to the godparents: "Ye are to take care that this child be brought to the bishop to be confirmed by him." Baptism, then, looks forward to Confirmation, just as Confirmation looks back to Baptism. The two services are parts of one whole. In Baptism we are made members of Christ and received into Christ's Church. In Confirmation we are admitted to fuller privileges in the Church. In the Church of England Confirmation is the gateway to Holy Communion. Baptism is the sacrament of admission into the Church. Holy Communion is the rite of fellowship in the Church. Our Lord instituted the two sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion. He did not institute Confirmation, and so the Church of England does not call it a sacrament. But it has the marks of a sacrament. There is the outward sign, the laying on of hands; and there is the inward spiritual grace, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us.

The Meaning of Confirmation.

1. *God's Part.*

Confirmation may be looked at from two points of view. We may think of it as a service in which we do something; and as a service in which God does something for us and in us. Both views of it are correct; but which should we put first? Surely we should put first what God does. Always in the Christian religion we must start from what God does. He created us; He loved us before we loved Him; He gave Jesus Christ to be our Saviour; His care surrounds us from our infancy when we knew nothing about it. So in Confirmation we must begin by thinking of it as a service in which God gives us the Holy Spirit to strengthen us. To "confirm" means to strengthen or make firm. The Holy Spirit is called the "Comforter" in the New Testament. "Comforter" is the English form of a Latin word meaning "strengthener." The work of the Holy Spirit is to give us divine aid in fighting the battle of life. In the Confirmation Service in the Prayer Book, the bishop before he lays his hands on the candidates prays this prayer: "Strengthen them, we beseech thee, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter." When he lays his hands on each one he prays that he may "daily increase in thy holy Spirit more and more."

2. *Our Part.*

What now is our part in Confirmation? We have to renew the vows and promises which were made in our name at Baptism. Confirmation is described in the Prayer Book as a service for those that are "come to years of discretion," for those, that is, who are old enough to understand the meaning of the service, and have been instructed in the Christian faith, and have resolved to lead a right life. If we look at the end of the Baptism Service, we shall see that the candidate for Confirmation must be able to say the Creed, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, and have had instruction in the Catechism. Opinions vary as to the proper age when Confirmation should be administered, but there is general agreement in our branch of the Church that the service is one specially suited to the time when we are passing out of boyhood and girlhood into manhood and womanhood. It is then that we need special help. Life with all its temptations is opening out before us. We are beginning to grow up. There is a splendid opportunity to make a new start, and to receive all the help which Confirmation and Holy Communion can give us.

We can see the importance of starting with what God does for us, because it has often been asked, "How can I dare to make in my own person the very solemn promises made for me in my Baptism? I am so weak. I know I shall never be able to

keep them." It is true that without God's help we could not keep those promises, but Confirmation, if we use it aright, brings the very help we need. With God to help us we can go forward, humbly yet confidently, to make the promises. We must note that, if a person is not confirmed, that does not excuse him from his responsibility. Everyone is bound to live according to the promises made in Baptism. Those who refuse to be confirmed are just missing the help they so much need.

Is Confirmation in the Bible?

It is sometimes said that Confirmation is not in the Bible, and that therefore we need not trouble about it. Now in the Prayer Book the title of the Confirmation Service is "The Order of Confirmation or Laying on of Hands." And though Confirmation as a service may not be mentioned in the New Testament by that name, we have many instances of the laying on of hands as the outward sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit. The following two examples show how the laying on of hands followed Baptism and completed it. In Acts viii. 15-17 we read how the Apostles Peter and John went down to Samaria, and prayed for the new converts there "that they might receive the Holy Ghost: for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they had been baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. Then laid they their

hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost." In Acts xix. 5-6 we read how at Ephesus St. Paul first baptised some people "into the name of the Lord Jesus," and then laid his hands on them, and "the Holy Ghost came on them."[1] It is clear, then, that something which was practically equivalent to our Confirmation was practised by the Church in the very earliest days, and has continued to be practised ever since. In the Western Church the name Confirmation came to be used about the fourth century A.D.

Laying on of Hands.

The laying of the bishop's hands upon the head of the Confirmation candidate is a natural symbol of blessing. Jesus laid His hands upon the children who were brought to Him to bless them.[2] Thus in picture fashion we remind ourselves that God has spiritual gifts to give us, and that in answer to prayer He sends into our hearts the Holy Spirit. But we must not make the mistake of thinking that God's grace or help passes through the bishop's fingers as the electric current passes along a wire. Nor must we forget that the gift of strength in Confirmation can be given only to those who seek for it, who are in earnest, who

[1] *Cf.* Epistle to Hebrews, vi. 1, 2, where the laying on of hands is linked with "the doctrine of baptism," suggesting that quite early it was a familiar rite in the Church.

[2] Matt. xix. 13.

really mean to be loyal servants of Christ. Our Confirmation will do us no good if we come to it carelessly, or without thoughtful and prayerful preparation. Just as Baptism was a new start, so Confirmation is a second new start. And the gift which we then receive can be given again and again. It is to remind the candidate of this that the bishop prays, when he lays his hands upon him, that "he may *daily* increase in thy Holy Spirit."

The Bishop's Prayer.

One clause in the prayer offered by the bishop before the laying on of hands has been already mentioned. The remainder of the prayer runs thus: "Daily increase in them thy manifold gifts of grace; the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and ghostly (= spiritual) strength; the spirit of knowledge and true godliness; and fill them, O Lord, with the spirit of thy holy fear, now and for ever."

This prayer is based upon a passage in Isa. xi. 2. The prophet is looking forward into the future. He tells of a time which is coming, when from the house of David shall arise a King, who shall rule with perfect righteousness, and set up a kingdom of love and peace, in which all hatred and strife shall vanish. This King will be able to do this, because He will be filled with the Spirit of God. This is how Isaiah describes Him: "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom

and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."

Was that prophecy of Isaiah ever fulfilled? It was fulfilled when Jesus Christ came to set up such a kingdom as the prophet described. The kingdom has not yet come perfectly, for men refuse to accept Christ as their King; but we can help to make it come by being loyal to Christ. Could any better prayer be offered for the Confirmation candidate than that he may have the many gifts of the Spirit, which belonged to the coming King in Isaiah's picture, and to Jesus Christ the pattern of sinless manhood? That prayer really means "may he be like Jesus." And the Holy Spirit does lead us to Jesus Christ, and through the Spirit Christ does shape us into His own likeness. The Confirmation candidate should be one who is growing daily more like Jesus. In the service of Holy Communion, to which Confirmation admits him, he will, if he is faithful, receive the spiritual gift of Christ's life, and so go on growing in goodness and holiness.

CHAPTER XII

HOLY COMMUNION

THERE are four accounts in the New Testament of the institution of the Holy Communion.[1] They differ in various points, but all agree that Jesus did certain things and said certain words. He took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and said: "This is my body." He took the cup and blessed it. Though all the writers do not say that He bade them drink of the cup, and do not entirely agree about the words which He used in connection with the cup, it is clear that He gave the disciples the cup to drink, and implied that, as the bread was His Body, so the cup was His Blood, which was being shed for the sins of the world. St. Paul adds that He said, "This do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."[2] That command the Church has ever since faithfully observed.

[1] Mark xiv. 22-25; Matt. xxvi. 26-29; Luke xxii. 17-20; 1 Cor. xi. 23-26.

[2] St. Luke also has these words (xxii. 19), but there is some doubt whether they are not in this Gospel a later addition. St. Paul's statement is evidence enough to show that our Lord was instituting a rite which He meant to be perpetuated.

The Scene in the Upper Room.

A. *The Passover.*

In studying the meaning of Holy Communion, we must begin with what happened in the Upper Room. It was there that Jesus instituted this sacrament. The meaning which it had then must be the meaning which it has today. No doubt our understanding of it has grown clearer, as we have come to find out through the centuries what a wonderful rite it is; but we cannot teach anything about it which would not have been true of that Last Supper in Jerusalem. To do so would be to deny that the mind of Christ is the final standard for the Christian.

The disciples were gathered together in the Upper Room to keep the Feast of the Passover, a feast which the Jews observed annually to commemorate the deliverance of their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. We read in Exod. xii. how the Israelites were ordered to put the blood of the lamb, which they were to eat, "upon the two side posts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it," and how, when the firstborn of the Egyptians were slain, the houses of the Israelites were "passed over." "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses."

The Last Supper, then, took place in a Pass-

over setting. Thoughts about the Passover would have been in the minds of all present. This is true even if, as some scholars think, the supper was not the actual Passover Feast, but a meal called Kiddush, with which the Jews celebrated the eve of the Sabbath and the eves of the great festivals, a meal at which the bread and the cup were blessed. A Kiddush held on the eve of the Passover must have been rich in Passover significance. Now the Passover commemorated a great deliverance. The Israelites were set free from the bondage of slavery; the first Passover may be described as the birthday of the nation. In the same way Jesus Christ came to set men free from the greater slavery of sin. The message of His Cross is a message of deliverance from sin. How appropriate it was that at this Jewish festival of deliverance He should have left His disciples a rite which was perpetually to commemorate His death on the Cross for the sin of the world. At the Passover a lamb was killed and eaten. We think of Christ as the Lamb of God sacrificing Himself for our redemption.

B. *The Blessing of the Bread and the Cup.*

At the Passover four cups of wine were blessed and shared by those present. The third cup was called "the cup of blessing," because the blessing or grace after the meal was said over it, in the following words: "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who hast created

the fruit of the vine." It was this third cup which our Lord blessed, saying (in St. Luke's account), " This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you." St. Paul calls the cup in Holy Communion " the cup of blessing." The bread used at the Passover was a thin unleavened cake. The head of the family broke this. He took the broken bread in his hand and said, " This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt." When Jesus took the bread and broke it, He said, " This is my body." He followed closely the form of the Jewish service, but gave a new meaning to the bread and cup.

The Meaning of our Lord's Words.

If we keep in mind this Passover ceremonial, we shall not find it difficult to understand what Jesus meant by the words He used. " This is the bread of affliction which our forefathers ate." It was not literally that old Egyptian bread. It represented it as in a picture or symbol. So " this is my body " meant that the broken bread in His hands represented as in a picture His body which was so soon to be broken on the Cross. Similarly with the cup. That wine outpoured was a representation of His Blood so soon to be shed for them on the Cross. To the Jew the idea of drinking real blood was abhorrent. The disciples understood well enough that the wine was but a symbol of the Blood.

People are often puzzled over the words, "This is my body." They can, when they were first uttered, have meant only one of three things. They might have meant, "This is my physical body of flesh and bones," but we know they did not mean that, for His physical body was reclining at the table. Or they might have meant, and it is sometimes taught that they did mean, "This is my heavenly body." But our Lord was not then ascended, and had not taken His heavenly body. He could not at one and the same time have had two bodies. He could not, therefore, be giving them His heavenly body. He Himself, according to the Passover usage, probably shared the bread and the cup with those present. Could He have been feeding upon His own body? The words could, therefore, only have meant, "This is a symbol or picture or representation of my body."

We must note also that the word "is" tells us nothing about the nature of what He was giving them. It is simply a link connecting "this" with "body." The word "is" can be used with different meanings. What meaning it has in any particular case must be decided by other considerations. If I say, "This is St. Paul's Cathedral," I may mean, "This building which is in front of me is St. Paul's"; or I may be showing a photograph of the cathedral to someone, and I should still *say*, "This is St. Paul's," but I should *mean*, "This is a representation or picture of St. Paul's." That the word "is" can signify "means"

or "represents" is clear from Gal. iv. 24, where we read, "These women *are* two covenants." Women cannot *be* covenants; they can only "represent" or "stand for" covenants. "This is my body," then, signifies, "This *means* my body."

A Memorial Service.

Our Lord, then, gave to His disciples broken bread and outpoured wine to remind them, as in a picture, of His death. And every time we celebrate the Holy Communion we are reminded in very beautiful fashion of His great sacrifice on the Cross for our sins. The Holy Communion is a Memorial Feast. It carries us back in thought both to the Upper Room and to Gethsemane and Calvary.

Feeding on Christ.

But it is more than a mere memorial. It is a way in which we receive life from the living Christ. We "feed" on Him. Just as the food we eat enters into our bodies, is assimilated, and becomes part of ourselves, so in this service we receive the spiritual food of Christ's Body and Blood. Body and blood stand for life and strength. The principle of life was thought by the Jews to lie in the blood.[1] The Catechism reminds us that the outward part of the sacrament is the bread and wine, the inward part is "the

[1] *Cf.* Gen. ix. 4; Lev. xvii. 11.

Body and Blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper"; and that the benefits derived from thus partaking are "the strengthening and refreshing of our souls."

But we must be clear that, as Article XXVIII. asserts, "the Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner." The bread and wine remain bread and wine, but for those who come in faith and repentance God uses this rite as a means by which the living Christ sustains us. Christian experience has proved that in this service the faithful communicant does receive life and strength from Christ, is joined closely to Him, and is helped for his daily living.

The Real Presence.

Throughout the whole service Christ is really present, though unseen. It is sometimes taught that He is *on* the altar, or *in* the consecrated bread and wine. Was He *in* the bread He gave His disciples in the Upper Room, and of which He Himself partook? Can we believe that the unseen, spiritual Christ is located in some grains of wheat? All this language about Christ being *in* the consecrated elements has no New Testament warrant. When we speak of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament, it is better to put out of our minds altogether the idea of locality or space, and to

think of a Spiritual Presence which reveals itself by a real *activity*. Christ in this sacrament is active towards us. He is really doing something. He is spiritually giving Himself to us, cleansing our hearts and strengthening our wills and uniting us to Himself. He is present throughout the whole service, and all the parts of the service—our prayers, confession, thanksgivings, offering of ourselves, as well as our reception of the bread and wine —are ways in which we may realise the presence of Christ, who is spiritually present to bless and help us. We "feed" on Him when we draw down His life into our own. But if we come to the service in a wrong or careless frame of mind we receive no benefit. To eat a piece of consecrated bread does us no spiritual good. The bread becomes the Body of Christ only for those who come in faith and repentance and expectation.

The Sacrifice.

We commemorate in this service the great sacrifice for sin offered by Jesus Christ. That sacrifice was offered once for all and cannot be repeated. On the Cross, as the Prayer of Consecration states, He "made there (by His one oblation of Himself once offered) a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world." But we can and do in this service link ourselves with His sacrifice. We do it in two ways:

(*a*) First, we plead His sacrifice before God. We set forth before men in dramatic fashion, or, as St. Paul says, we "show forth the Lord's death," as the source of all our greatest spiritual benefits. We say:

> "Look, Father, look on His anointed Face,
> And only look on us as found in Him."

The benefits of the Cross this service helps us to appropriate. We plead Christ's sacrifice as the ground of our trust in God's forgiving love, and as the ground of our hope that one day through the power of Christ our living Redeemer we shall be fashioned into His likeness. We do not offer again the sacrifice which He offered once for all, but we thankfully commemorate it and link ourselves with it.

(*b*) Secondly, we offer ourselves in sacrifice to God, as the Prayer of Oblation or offering in the Communion Service states. "And here we offer and present unto thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively (living) sacrifice unto thee." Jesus died for us on the Cross; but the Cross is nothing to us unless we make it our own, enter into its spirit, die ourselves to sin, and offer ourselves in service to God. As the Epistle to the Hebrews reminds us, the only sacrifice acceptable to God is the sacrifice of our wills and hearts.[1] The communicant should be one who is whole-heartedly giving himself to Christ in loyal obedience and service.

[1] Heb. x. 1-10.

The Fellowship.

The service of Holy Communion is essentially a service of fellowship. We share one loaf, we drink one cup. We look to one Saviour and Master. We come all of us as sinful men and women, needing pardon and strength. This thought of fellowship is often forgotten in this service. Each one comes, as is right, with his or her individual need, but is apt to forget the social side of the rite. And often communicants who kneel together to receive the living Christ remain entire strangers to each other in ordinary life. Certainly it was easier in earlier days, when the congregations were small, for Christians to feel their oneness; but more might be done today to bring together the communicants of a parish, so that they should feel they were one body. And this thought of fellowship takes a wider range in our Communion Service. We link ourselves, not only with our fellow-worshippers, but with those who have gone before,[1] and with "angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven." We think of ourselves as sharing in the worship of the One God, whom they too worship. Thus we unite ourselves in thought with all spiritual beings

[1] In the Prayer for the Church Militant we bless God's "holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear." The "militant" Church is the Church "fighting" on earth. The Church "triumphant" is made up of those faithful ones who have won their victory and passed on. We and they are one fellowship in Christ.

everywhere, for all of whom Christ is Lord, and we pray that we may one day be ourselves among that company of the redeemed who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." It is perhaps at the great Festivals of the Church that we most clearly realise this element of adoration and worship in the service.

A Many-Sided Service.

How rich, then, in meaning is this service, and under how many aspects may we regard it! (1) It is a service of remembrance, a memorial of Christ's death for sin. (2) It is a service of worship and thanksgiving, a Eucharist (= giving of thanks) in which we praise God for all His mercies, and, above all, for His love in redemption. (3) It is "a means of grace" by which the living Christ unites us to Himself and strengthens us for the battle of life. (4) It is a service of self-dedication in which we, pleading Christ's death for us, offer ourselves, soul and body, to His service. (5) It is a service of fellowship. We have to grow into the meaning of the service. We can make it mean much or little. Those who find most help in it are those who are keeping closest to Jesus Christ in daily life.

CHAPTER XIII

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

OUGHT I to go to Confession ? is a question which probably many are asking themselves. They have friends who go and say they are helped by going. They hear sermons in which the duty of going to Confession is strongly urged. They are aware that there is a vigorous party in the Church which advocates the practice of Confession as a laudable Catholic custom. Let us examine the matter in the light of Scripture, primitive Church practice, and the teaching of the Church of England. We will deal first with Confession, and then with Absolution.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS.

The Bible everywhere emphasises the necessity of confession of our sins to God, but nowhere does it say that we are to confess to man, except in the case of acknowledging to our neighbour some trespass which we have committed against him. In Jas. v. 16 occur these words: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed." This means acknowledging our trespass to a neighbour, and perhaps also

acknowledging our sins before the assembled company of our fellow-Christians. It certainly does not mean that we are to make confession to a priest, so that we may receive absolution and pardon. The ecclesiastical system of the Confessional is not found in Holy Scripture.

The Practice of the Early Church.

In primitive times Church discipline was a real force, as it is not today. An offender was called to account before the bishop and clergy, and then before the whole congregation, if the bishop and clergy judged that it was an offence which should be openly confessed. He was forbidden to receive the Holy Communion until he had given public proof of his repentance. This was because his offence was not only against God, but also against the Church, and the Church was right in thus taking steps to preserve her purity. But it is to be noted that his confession was not made to an individual priest with a view to obtaining absolution. It was made, either to the whole congregation, or to the clergy as representing the congregation; and it was made, not only to obtain pardon from God, but to show to his brethren, whom the sinner had offended, that he was truly penitent. Public confession to the congregation, not private confession to a priest, was the practice of the Church for some four centuries.

The Growth of Private Confession.

Gradually, however, the practice of private confession grew up. It is probable that the practice began as early as the time of St. Chrysostom, who was made Patriarch of Constantinople in A.D. 398, for in his writings he repeatedly emphasises the need of confessing to God alone, as if he were aware that another practice was coming to the front. "I beseech you, make your confessions continually to God. For I do not bring thee into a theatre of thy fellow-servants, neither do I constrain thee to discover thy sins unto men." Private confession to a priest was greatly helped by two things. First, Pope Leo I. (A.D. 440-461), in a letter to the bishops of Campania, directs that the congregation shall no longer be told of the sins of penitents, but that confession shall be made to the priest alone. Secondly, when the barbarian tribes of the north invaded Rome, and the Roman Empire began, in the fifth and following centuries to fall to pieces, the Church was faced with the difficulty of dealing with these wild and ignorant tribesmen. They could not be induced to submit to the public discipline of the Church, but in many cases they could be persuaded to make private confession. For the next six centuries the practice of private confession grew. Then in A.D. 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council, under Pope Innocent III., made habitual confession to a priest the rule of the Church. Confession then

became compulsory, and compulsory confession remained the rule of the Church until the Reformation.

What the Church of England Teaches.

At the Reformation the Church of England rejected habitual and compulsory confession to a priest, which is nowhere taught in the Book of Common Prayer. If we examine our Prayer Book, we shall see that it provides a form of Confession and Absolution in the Communion Service, and another form at the beginning of Morning and Evening Prayer. Both forms of confession are called "a general confession." They were introduced by the Reformers to discourage the practice of private confession, and to provide the individual worshipper with a form of confession to God which might help him. Each individual when he used the general form would apply it to his own special case. We might well make more use than we do of these forms in our private prayers.

But, though the Church of England thus discourages the habit of private confession, she does not altogether rule it out. She deals with the case of the man troubled in conscience, who feels that he cannot come to Holy Communion because of some sin he has committed, and is doubtful whether God will pardon him. In the first long exhortation after the Prayer for the Church Militant in the Communion Service such a person

is bidden, " Come to me, or to some other discreet and learned Minister of God's Word, and open his grief; that by the ministry of God's holy word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly [= spiritual] counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience."

The Church deals also with the case of the sinner on his death-bed who feels uneasy in mind. In the service for the Visitation of the Sick there is a rubric which runs thus: " Here shall the sick person be moved to make a special confession of his sins, if he feels his conscience troubled with any special matter. After which Confession, the Priest shall absolve him (if he humbly and heartily desire it)."

In these two cases the Church of England approves of private confession, and no sensible person will quarrel with her directions. It is part of the duty of a minister to give spiritual advice to those who seek it from him, and to assure them of God's pardon if they repent. Many a person troubled in mind would be greatly helped if he would go to his parish clergyman as to a friend and tell him of his difficulties.

Arguments for and against Confession.

We must distinguish between confession and habitual confession. To confess a fault to a human being is a natural thing to do. A child confesses some wrong deed to its mother and is

comforted thereby. An uneasy conscience is often quieted if the offender tells a brother man of his trouble. And there are those who feel the need of confessing to a priest, so that they may be sure that they are being utterly honest and sincere. They have a dread of self-deception. "For him who confesses, shams are over and realities have begun." Others, however, think it strange that such people cannot be satisfied by making a complete confession to God. But we have to take human nature as we find it, and to remember that many are often genuinely perplexed about their religious life, and feel themselves to be weak and in need of human help. The fact that confession is widely practised proves that there is a strong desire for it. The system of the Confessional, on the other hand, is full of danger. There is danger for the priest, who, unless he is living close to God, may easily have his mind poisoned by the recital of the sins told him. And there is a double danger for the penitent. He may be tempted to keep back something and not make a full confession, in which case he is not sincere. Or he may come to regard his confession as a kind of mechanical way of obtaining pardon. It is easy to slip into the habit of thinking, "I can do this or that; I will put it right when I confess next time."

The message of the Gospel is that every child of God can come direct into the Father's presence to seek forgiveness. If he comes with true

repentance, he may be sure of the divine pardon. To press confession to a priest as a duty is to forget the Gospel of the free forgiveness of God. The prodigal son in the parable needed no priest to secure for him his father's pardon. He went straight to his father and was forgiven and welcomed. Confession may be good for some at long intervals as a medicine. Treated as a food it tends for normal persons to harm the spiritual life. Those who understand what the Gospel of God's Love means, and are trying to be utterly sincere with God, will not feel any need for habitual confession to a priest.

Absolution.

After confession has been made, the Absolution is pronounced. There are three forms of Absolution in the Prayer Book. (1) One is at the beginning of Morning and Evening Prayer, where it is stated that God "hath given power and commandment to his ministers to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the Absolution and Remission of their sins." Here the minister makes a *declaration* that God is ready to pardon. (2) The second form of Absolution is in the Communion Service, where, after stating that God has promised forgiveness to those who truly repent, the minister *prays* that God will pardon those present. May God, he says, "have mercy upon you; pardon and deliver you from all your

sins." (3) The third form of Absolution is in the Service for the Visitation of the Sick, and runs thus: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive thee thine offences: And by his authority committed to me, I absolve thee from thy sins, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

This form of Absolution differs from the others in that it asserts that the Church, acting through its ministers, has power to absolve. The priest absolves in virtue of Christ's authority committed to him as a minister of the Church.

When did Christ give this authority to His Church? Two texts are sometimes quoted as supplying the answer; and it is important that we should carefully examine them.

Two Texts Examined.

(*a*) One is Matt. xviii. 15, which runs: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

(*b*) The other is John xx. 23: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained."

With regard to the first text, the word is "whatsoever." It refers to things, not persons.

"Binding" and "loosing" was the customary Jewish phrase for forbidding and permitting. Our Lord was giving the Apostles authority to make rules for the conduct of the Church. They might say what was to be done and what not done, and were promised the divine approval if their decisions were in accordance with God's will. The text cannot refer to the absolution of persons.

The words of the second text Jesus spoke to the assembled disciples on the evening of the first Easter Day. He was sending them out on their mission. He gave them the gift of the Spirit, and promised that the Spirit would aid them in their work. Their work was to admit by Baptism new members into the Church. Baptism is described as being "for the remission of sins."[1] How could they know whom to admit and whom to reject? If they admitted anyone into the Church they "remitted" his sins; if they refused anyone they "retained" his sins. They were told that they would receive the guidance of the Spirit for this difficult task. That is the original meaning of the words, which clearly do not sanction Confession and Absolution as ordinarily understood.

[1] Acts ii. 38. See Chapter X. on Baptism; and for the meaning of Baptism as a cleansing from sin and an entrance into new life *cf.* Gal. iii. 26, 27; Col. ii. 12; Rom. vi. 3-7.

Absolution and Forgiveness.

Now it cannot be denied that the form of Absolution in the Service for the Visitation of the Sick does, as it stands, seem to teach the doctrine of priestly absolution. It puts the power of absolution into the hands of the minister. But there are various points we should remember if we want to form a right judgment on the whole matter.

1. Nothing can alter the fact that God alone can forgive sins. The Absolution said by the priest does not make God forgive, or make Him more willing to forgive. That it does not bring about the forgiveness of the sinner is surely proved by the fact that this Absolution is immediately followed by a prayer that the man may be forgiven by God. Why pray that God will forgive him if his forgiveness has already been procured by the priest's absolution ?

2. The Absolution, therefore, is not like the pronouncement of a judge who declares that he finds the prisoner not guilty. Whether the man is really forgiven by God depends on his state of heart, which the priest is unable to read with certainty.

3. Only in the case of a very sick man is this form of Absolution used. Permission to use it in other cases was originally granted, but was withdrawn in 1552. We can perhaps understand why it was felt wise to allow this stronger form

in this one case. A dying man with an uneasy conscience needs above all things assurance that he is forgiven. He wants peace of mind. Here he is given the assurance in the most authoritative form. There stands before him an accredited minister of the Church, who tells him that Jesus Christ left power with the Church, acting in His name and as His instrument, to forgive. It is as if Jesus Christ were in the sick-room saying to the dying man, " Peace be unto you."

The broad conclusion of the matter is this. Just as some people feel at times the need of confession, so there are some who feel at times the need of the assurance which an official pronouncement of absolution gives. But others, who have had in their own lives experience of the reality of the divine pardon, and know that God is to be trusted utterly, will not feel the need of being absolved by a human being. This is essentially a case where no pressure should be put on anyone to come to confession that he may be absolved. Let each person act according to the dictates of his own conscience.

CHAPTER XIV

MY DUTY AS A MEMBER OF THE CHURCH

MANY people, though they are members of the Church, do not realise that they have any duties or responsibilities in connection with their membership. They take very little interest in their Church, and do very little to help it. Sometimes this is because they are not in earnest over their religion; sometimes it is because they have never been taught that they have a duty to their Church. They have been accustomed to think of religion as just a private matter between their own souls and God. But, as we have seen, Christianity is the religion of a society or fellowship; and the Church is the fellowship of all those who accept Jesus Christ as the Truth. If we read the New Testament, we see how very real this sense of fellowship was in the first days of the Church, how Christians then had a strong feeling of their oneness as members of one body. And this idea of fellowship in a society underlies much of the teaching of our Book of Common Prayer. Baptism, for example, is a service of admission into a society; Holy Communion is essentially a service of fellowship; and when the congregation gives its alms for the relief of the sick or poor, it

does so because it recognises that they are members with them of the same body. Cannot we all try to create the spirit of real fellowship in the parish in which we live? Quarrels and divisions among Christians should never exist. Church life in a parish ought to be a signal example of loving fellowship. Membership in the Church, therefore, does mean something definite. Let us see what are some of its duties and responsibilities.

Public Worship.

To attend regularly the services of public worship is an obvious duty. It is often said, "I get no good from going to church. The services are dull, the sermons are duller. Why should I go?" Is not the person who says that making two mistakes? First, he makes the mistake of thinking that we go to church mainly to *get* something. Should we not rather go to *give* something? We should go to give God of our very best: our praise, our prayers, our whole selves. If we went to church in that spirit of giving, resolved to throw ourselves wholeheartedly into the service and to join in the responses, what a difference it would make! We should then find that we got something of real help, a sense of God's presence, an uplift of our whole being, and strength for the work of the week. Worship is giving rather than getting. The second mistake is the failure to see that the character of

the whole service depends upon the spirit of the worshippers. The congregation, as well as the clergyman, can make the service dull. And many a parish priest would be immensely helped in his taking of the service, as well as in all his work, if his parishioners would back him up by coming to church and giving of their best. We complain of a dull service. What if we ourselves are dull?

With an immense number of people the habit of church-going is out of fashion. We should ask ourselves whether we can afford to lose the help which Sunday can give if it is rightly used. The excuse is sometimes made that God can be worshipped equally well at home or in the fields. Certainly God can be worshipped outside a church, but *is* He so worshipped by those who do not come to church and give that as their excuse? Jesus was in the habit of attending the services at the Jewish synagogue. If He needed that help, can we do without the help which common worship gives? We should remember also that public worship is "family worship." We worship together as a family of God's children. If we stay away from church we are weakening the fellowship of the family.

Holy Communion.

Those who have been confirmed should be regular communicants. One of the rubrics at the end of the Service of Holy Communion in the

Prayer Book says: "Every Parishioner shall communicate at the least three times in the year, of which Easter to be one." Three times is not very often, and most people will wish to come more frequently. No hard-and-fast rule about attendance at Holy Communion can be laid down, but those who are in earnest, and know what help this service can be, will want to come at least once a month, if not weekly. Each can make his own rule.

At what hour should I go to Holy Communion? It is surely best to go early, when we are fresh, so that we may begin the day with this act of self-dedication. But the hour is of secondary importance. A midday communion, or an evening communion, if we go thoughtfully and after due preparation, may be as helpful as an early communion, and for many these may be the only possible times.

Should I go fasting? The Church of England has wisely refused to make any rule about that. All that our Church requires is stated in the Invitation in the Communion Service, where repentance, love, and an intention to lead a new life are laid down as the only conditions. We can never forget that the Lord's Supper was instituted in the evening at a meal. What is of importance is not whether we come fasting or not, but whether we come in faith and repentance. In this matter let each one do what he considers will best help him to worship aright.

If we neglect Holy Communion we are not only depriving ourselves of a very real source of help, but we may be sure that something is wrong with our religion. Because those who are sincerely trying to be loyal to Jesus Christ will certainly want to come to a service in which, as experience proves, they can meet with Him, and receive into themselves the gift of His Life and Presence.

Almsgiving.

To give a proportion of our money to God is the plain duty of every Christian. "It is more blessed to give than to receive," said Jesus. The proportion which each can give will vary with the amount of his income. A man with £500 a year can afford to give more than a man with £200 a year, provided their general circumstances are the same. What each should ask himself is this: What amount of real self-sacrifice comes into my life? How much do I spend on myself, how much on others? It is important that we should have some rule about giving. Many people give without rule, and at the end of a year, if they counted up what they had given away in charity, would find it to be much less than they had supposed. Our money is a trust from God. It is not "all our own." If we miss going to church on one Sunday, should we not give double the next? Should the work of the Church be allowed to suffer because we happen to be away? "He

that soweth little shall reap little; and he that soweth plenteously shall reap plenteously. Let every man do according as he is disposed in his heart, not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver."

Taking Interest in Church Affairs.

The Church is the Church of the lay people, not simply of the clergy. These latter are only servants or ministers of the people. The life of the Church can never be strong and vigorous unless all its members take an interest in it. We should begin by taking an interest in our own parish. Everyone should try to know the clergy of the parish. If a parish meeting of any kind is held we should make a point of attending it. We should see that our names are placed on the electoral church roll, so that we may be able to vote for the members of the Parochial Church Council. Some can look forward to becoming members of that Council, an opportunity for service which should not be neglected if it offers itself. Helpers for various kinds of parish work are always needed. We should be ready to do what we can in this matter. It all means time and trouble; but then all Christians are called to serve others. If we take in a Church newspaper we can try to study intelligently some of the larger problems of the Church. Reforms can be carried through only if there is a public opinion behind

them. We can all help to form that public opinion. In ways like these we shall be proving that our Church membership really means something.

Foreign Missions.

Every member of the Church should be a keen supporter of Foreign Missions. It is strange that so many Christians take no interest in the spread of Christ's kingdom overseas; and some even show hostility to missionary work. That Christ meant His kingdom to spread is clear.[1] He was Himself the first Missionary. And if He is the Saviour of all men, then all have a right to know about Him. But they cannot know unless they are told. Want of interest in this work is largely due to ignorance. It is difficult to be interested in something about which we have no knowledge. But we can study the subject. We can take in and read a missionary paper. We can go to the missionary meetings in our parish. If we do this we shall come to see the greatness and importance of the work. The Church as a whole ought to be the great missionary society. At present it is not. Only a small number of Church people are missionary-hearted. But that number is growing as people begin to see the splendid character of this work, and how near it is to the heart of Christ. We are all called on to be "fellow-workers" with

[1] Matt. xxviii. 19; John xii. 32; *cf.* the Parables describing the growth of the Kingdom of God.

Christ in His great task of redeeming the world. The true missionary motive is desire to share in Christ's work. In proportion as Christ means much to us shall we be eager for the spread of His kingdom, eager to be fellow-builders with Him of the Church or Body of Christ.

Rules.

Probably we shall all do well to make some rules for ourselves about worship and Holy Communion, and almsgiving, and times for prayer. Rules may become a burden; but, if wisely used, they can be of great help. They enable us to have method in our religious life. We need method in business, in keeping a house; do we not need method in the highest of all work, the work of serving God? If we make no rules in religion, we shall certainly become slack. The Christian life should be an ordered life, based on principle, with self-discipline in it. Only an ordered life can be either really happy or strong.

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